

PROK, E-NEWS, October 2005

PROK in Focus

1. 90th General Assembly

The 90th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) was held at Yangnim Church in Kwangju City on September 27-30. About 700 delegates from 24 presbyteries and some 200 guests including 11 representatives of 8 overseas partner churches gathered together under the theme "God of Grace, Transform the World", to review the life and mission of the PROK and articulate its future mission agendas.

In the opening worship, outgoing Moderator Rev. Kim Dong-Won delivered the sermon, highlighting God's grace as the transformative power in history. On the first evening the delegates elected new leaders: Rev. Park Won-Keun as Moderator, and Rev. Yang Tae-Yoon and Elder Choo Byung-Kook as Vice-Moderators.

On the second day, standing committees presented their reports. In the General Secretary's report Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo reiterated that the PROK must continue to work for peaceful reunification, social justice, overseas mission and ecumenical cooperation in order to transform the PROK into a community of sharing and serving. In the afternoon the overseas guests brought the greetings of their churches; a common theme in their greetings was their deep appreciation of the PROK's prophetic role in Korean society and the ecumenical community and their urging that the PROK continue this role. Of particular significance was the participation of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar for the first time, after the PROK and PCM signed a partnership agreement in February, 2005; the PCM was represented by Rev Ral Kunga, Moderator, and Rev Deng Thuama, General Secretary.

On the second evening the delegates and guests, together with local church members, gathered for worship at the Kwangju 5.18 National Memorial Cemetery where hundreds of people killed in May 1980 by the military dictatorial regime lie buried. In his sermon, Rev. Park Hyung-Kyu, a past Moderator and central figure in the people's movement for democracy, told the delegates, "the PROK must not lose its spirit of resistance and transformation and must continue its commitment to realizing God's reign of justice, peace and reconciliation in order to honour and uphold the sacrificial spirit of Kwangju."

On the third day, a former Minister of the Unification Department of the Korean government delivered a special lecture on peaceful reunification. He urged that

“reunification is a long process which requires mutual understanding and trust, patience and hope.” He particularly noted that economic, cultural and religious cooperation has been very crucial in promoting mutual trust in the process of reunification. In the evening of the same day, the delegates reviewed ongoing programs and related budgets.

On the last day, the delegates approved several new projects and reaffirmed the PROK’s commitment to ongoing projects. Peace initiatives, the movement for reunification, and ecumenical cooperation were the priorities among these. Of particular significance was the decision to study for a year the proposal brought by the PROK women’s groups to create a ‘Women’s Committee’ as a standing committee of the PROK General Assembly.

In the closing worship on the fourth day the Moderator, Rev. Park Won-Keun, appealed to all delegates to transform the Korean church, Korean society and the world through the grace of God. At the end of the worship the delegates unanimously accepted the Declaration of the 90th General Assembly. The declaration affirms a new commitment to:

1. promote economic justice and protect the rights of marginalized people;
2. promote peace and denounce war and militarization;
3. achieve peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula;
4. continue reform towards the attainment of participatory democracy in Korea;
5. articulate a life-centered mission policy;
6. transform the Korean church.

2. PROK statement on the six-party talks

On September 20 the PROK issued a statement welcoming the breakthrough in the six-party talks which closed on September 19 in Beijing. In the final stage of the talks, North Korea agreed to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and to return to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, ending the three-year nuclear deadlock.

In the PROK statement, Rev. Na Haek-Jip, Chairperson of the PROK Reunification Committee, stressed that we Koreans must seek peaceful measures to achieve reunification. He also urged international communities to draw a road-map directing us to a concrete implementation of the six-party agreement.

3. Press conference on WTO Meeting

On Oct. 20th, the PROK and the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (CISJD) held a joint press conference to respond to the 6th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) which will be held December 13-16, 2005 in Hong Kong. The press conference, titled “The WTO, a Challenge to the Church and Civil Society in Korea,” aimed to raise awareness of the impact of WTO on the marginalized people in society. In the press conference the PROK spelled out that

the mechanism of the WTO, dominated by the free-market ideology, is clearly contrary to the will of God who includes every person in God's salvific history.

NGO activists unanimously agree that the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) and Privatization will be burning issues. On December 9-11, prior to the WTO Conference, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) will hold a conference on "Globalizing Economic Justice and Social Sustainability" to reflect on the economic justice aspect of the WTO and to search for alternative ways towards social justice. The PROK Church and Society Committee plans to send 16 delegates to the CCA conference to share the PROK's theological perspective and action plans with other churches in Asia as well as the world.

It is reported that more than 1,000 Korean farmers will fly to Hong Kong to mobilize a mass movement against the liberalization of agricultural trade.

4. PROK response to Hurricane Katrina and Pakistan-India Earthquake

Responding to the terrible loss of life and devastating destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina which struck the United States Gulf Coast at the end of August, and by the massive earthquake which shattered parts of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan on October 8th, the PROK sent letters to church partners in the US and to the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, expressing prayer and support for the suffering people. In his letters to our sisters and brothers in the United States and in Pakistan, the General Secretary affirmed, respectively, that, "as one community of faith around the world, we are all deeply affected" and that "while we are of many faiths, we are one community of believers; the pain of one is the pain of all."

Ecumenical Movement in Focus

7th Korea-Japan URM Consultation

The 7th Korea-Japan Urban-Rural Mission Consultation was held on October 4-7 at the Euwang Centre in Kyungkee Province, under the theme "Community of Life and Peace". The main objective of the consultation was to articulate the Christian perspective on the challenges of globalization backed by the neo-liberal economic policy. Some 16 URM activists from Japan and Korea participated in the consultation.

In his keynote presentation, Rev. Yang Kwon-Suk of the Anglican University in Seoul pointed out that "economic globalization goes against the biblical image of peace and life, and the church must articulate alternatives to globalization in order to reclaim God as the source of peace and life." The participants then heard case studies on mission with migrant workers and farmers

On the last day, the participating churches issued a joint declaration urging the churches and governments of the two countries to work for those who are marginalized in this era of globalization. The following points were highlighted in the declaration:

1. The current economic order is against God' will.
2. We reaffirm that life, peace and community based on justice is a universal value basic to a sustainable society.
3. We must listen to the voice of the weak.
4. We must live out alternative ways of life to resist and transform the current economic order governed by market logic.
5. We oppose the liberalization of the labour market.
6. We oppose the liberalization of agricultural trade.
7. We demand that governments protect the rights of migrant workers.

PROK E-News is a publication of The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).
Editor: Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, General Secretary