

PROK E-NEWS December 2005

PROK in Focus

1. 2005 Christmas Message

In his Christmas message, Rev. Park Won-Keun, Moderator of the PROK, asked Christians in Korea and our partners around the world to remember and celebrate the gift of Jesus Christ who brings God's new day of justice, peace, transforming love and fullness of life. Particularly, he urged all fellow Christians to pray for all those whose lives are threatened by poverty, violence, war, disease, environmental disaster. He asked them to hold a strong faith in Jesus Christ who challenges us to proclaim the good news for all and transform the world in his grace.

2. Opening of the Cambodia Ecumenical Church

For the past several years the Church Men's Association of Seoul-South Presbytery of the PROK has raised funds to initiate mission work in Cambodia. Finally, in October 2005, after close cooperation with Christians in Cambodia, a small two-story house in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, was purchased to house the new Student Christian Center (SCC) and Ecumenical Church (EC). The opening ceremony and service of dedication was held on December 6, attended by Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, PROK General Secretary, and five representatives of the Church Men's Association of the Seoul-South Presbytery, to celebrate this historical beginning of PROK mission cooperation in Cambodia.

In his sermon during the service of dedication, Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo urged that "the Student Christian Center and Ecumenical Church must be a strong foundation of Christian faith to proclaim vision and hope for Cambodian society and churches," and challenged the members of the SCC and EC to be peace-makers not only for Cambodia but also for the whole Indochina region. The corner-stone was unveiled by members of the SCC and EC together with the representatives of the PROK Men's Association to declare the same faith that Peter "the rock" had in Jesus Christ and express their strong dedication to engaging in joint mission work in Cambodia and other Indochina countries. The PROK and the SCC and EC believe that the SCC and EC will be a community centre where young Cambodian Christians will commit themselves to work for justice, peace and ecumenism.

3. Conference on Globalizing Economic Justice and Social Sustainability

On December 9-11, 2005 the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held an ecumenical conference on "Globalizing Economic Justice and Social Sustainability" in Hong Kong, immediately prior to the 6th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held December 13-18, also in Hong Kong. About 200

members of people's organizations, faith-based communities and social movements from 29 countries participated in the CCA conference, to assess and protest against the impact of WTO policies on the world's poor and to make recommendations to address the hardships that the WTO has created. The PROK was represented at the CCA conference by 16 members of the Rural Ministers Association and Mission in Solidarity with Life.

Through keynote-presentations, discussion and storytelling, the participants of the CCA conference reached a common understanding that the policies the WTO promotes and enforces are life-threatening to the world's poor. People's food sovereignty, for example, "is being undermined by the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA). Agriculture, specifically food production, has become the monopoly of large corporations which, through the current negotiations, aim at further reducing protection to farmers through tariffs or subsidies, while the rich nations use protectionism for their agribusinesses. Small farmers are affected most as they are being denied their identity, and they watch as their livelihoods are destroyed by agribusinesses and their land is given to large landowners and local elites, resulting in increasing hunger and malnutrition in Asia and the rest of the world."...."Moreover, the demands for developing countries to lower their tariffs on manufactured goods under the proposed agreement on Non-agricultural Market Access (NAMA) removes one of the last remaining tools they have to create and protect their own industrial sector. In addition, the commodification of natural resources through NAMA undermines the values of the commons: integrity of creation, community, local wisdom and life. The costs of environmental degradation are not considered in trade negotiations and cannot be contained within state boundaries."

The CCA conference confirmed that "our world today is characterized by human insecurity which manifests itself in poverty, war, violation of people's human rights, gender inequality, displacement from land and lack of jobs, health care, education and social services, resulting in fear, silence and a feeling of vulnerability, broken relationships and communities, religious animosities, forced migration and indifference and contempt for the law. Indeed, the WTO's policies and procedures further enslave people in poverty. In short, the basis of trade should be to improve human security."

To reverse these trends, the participants called on their member governments to:

- Not compromise the nation's sovereignty;
- Uphold the fulfillment of their human rights obligations they have made to the United Nations and international community;

and the delegates to the WTO to:

- Respect people's food sovereignty and terminate the current negotiations on agriculture and the production of food;
- Cancel the negotiations on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regarding seeds and medicine;
- Conduct an assessment of the impact of WTO agreements in the past 10 years on the world's people, especially the poor, before entering into any further trade agreements;
- Increase transparency and accountability in trade negotiations;

- Dismantle the WTO as it continues to operate solely in capital's interest.

Further details, including the participants' "Message to the Faith Communities" may be found on the CCA website, from which the above quotes are taken.

4. Korean-Chinese migrant workers end live-in prayer protest

The November issue of PROK E-News reported the live-in prayer protest being conducted by Korean-Chinese workers demanding the right, already granted to other Koreans living outside Korea except those in China and the former Soviet Union, to unconditionally enter and leave Korea. Having begun the protest on August 23 of this year, they ended it on December 15th, accepting the announcement of the government that H-2 visas will be granted to ethnic Koreans in China and the former Soviet Union. Under the multiple-entry H-2 visa, Koreans from those countries will be permitted to stay in Korea for up to five years consecutively, and within those years, to legally work for two years. This is a new system, combining visitor and work visa, to be applied to ethnic Koreans only in those countries. The government has also announced a quota system to be applied to these ethnic Koreans: In 2006 up to 30,000 may enter Korea with the H-2 visa, 80% of these from China, 20% from the former Soviet Union. In 2007, with the same percentages, 50,000; in 2008, 100,000 may enter, and from 2010 the government will impose no limit on those granted the H-2 visa. While it is still far from the full justice being sought by these ethnic Koreans and their supporters, it is accepted as a step sufficiently in the right direction to allow an end to their prayer protest.

Ecumenical Movement in Focus

On November 1, 2005 the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) held a symposium on the inter-related issues of building peace on the Korean peninsula and the new US law on human rights in North Korea. The view of the 400 participants of the NCCCK symposium was that the human rights situation of the North must be considered within the broader concept of establishing peace on the Korean peninsula and guaranteeing the survival of the whole Korean people.

In his presentation, Dr. Chung Tae-Wook, Professor of Law at Youngnam University in Daegu, voiced his suspicion that the concern of the international community for human rights in North Korea is in some cases not so much in the spirit of justice as in concern for political interests. Under its law on human rights in North Korea, the US has approved future funding for non-governmental organizations working for human rights in North Korea and for developing a North Korean market economy. The US has stated that unless North Korea improves its human rights situation, the US will cease sending aid; how, then, can the US help improve the human rights situation if it stops supporting the economic recovery of the North? Dr. Chung claimed that the aim of this law is not to support human rights but to overthrow the North Korean regime.

Rev. Im Kwang-Bin, General Secretary of the ecumenical National Association of Clergy for Justice and Peace, focused on the issue of refugees from the North,

thousands of whom are in hiding in China. He urged that, rather than help these to escape to South Korea, as some conservative Christian organizations are doing, he claimed, for their own commercial benefit, we should support the recent move of the North Korean government to allow North Koreans to work legally in China, and urge the North Korean regime to not punish those refugees who return to the North.

Rev. Lee Kang-Shil, representative of a large civic umbrella group supporting the implementation of the June 15, 2000 Summit Declaration, urged that the concept of reunification as the absorption of the North into the South, being pushed by some conservative churches, must be ruled out, and called on Korean churches to support the implementation of the June 15 Declaration.

The participants affirmed the symposium closing statement, resolving: 1) Aware of the true realities of the US law on human rights in North Korea, we will try to block its implementation. 2) We ask the international community to walk closely with the North Korean regime, encouraging it to develop in a truly humanitarian direction. 3) Recognizing refugees from the North as our kin, who also yearn for peace and reunification, we will try to walk and live with them as companions on the way. 4) We will work to build peace on the peninsula and support the economic recovery of the North and survival of the people of the North, and encourage cooperation and exchange between the church in South and North and the international community. (*Summary, not direct quotes*)

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