

PROK E-NEWS May 2006

PROK Partners' Consultation

The PROK Partners' Consultation held at PROK Academy House in Seoul on May 1, 2006 provided an important opportunity to both the PROK and its partner churches to articulate their vision and mission in today's rapidly changing world. The Consultation brought together nineteen representatives of thirteen overseas partners in Asia, Europe and North America; over twenty PROK ministers and lay people (excluding staff and volunteers); and eight ecumenical co-workers sent and received by the PROK. Under the theme, "New Vision and Challenges to Partnership in the Changing Global Context", the participants sought to deepen their vision of partnership and to build more solid partner relations.

The Asian perspective of partnership, shared by Mr. Nicanor Primavera of The United Church of Christ in the Philippines, is captured in such words as "Come visit, admire our cultural and natural landscapes, but please don't help us. Many problems will arise when you 'help' us. We want you just to accompany us in our journey, so that we gain the confidence that, with you walking with us and with God's assurances, we can help ourselves." In a partnership of mutual accountability, "both parties are willing to leave everything...and follow the Christ who incarnates among his people and accompanies them in their often difficult journey towards Shalom."

The North American perspective articulated by Ms. Bern Jagunos of The United Church of Canada perceives partnership as a relationship in which there is equality of contribution to a common task; companionship involving listening intently to each partner's experiences, the sharing of analysis and the working of out strategies for social change and resource sharing.

The European perspective presented by Ms. Doris Grohs of mission 21 evangelisches missionswerk basel, defines partnership as accountability towards each church in partnership and before God. Cooperation among partners can take the form of thinking globally and acting locally, which can be shown in learning, in humility, from one another's experiences.

In his presentation, "Towards Transformation: The Vision and Mission of the PROK" General Secretary Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo stressed that the PROK must consolidate its efforts to establish a just economic order in the society; strengthen its social welfare mission for vulnerable groups; reform its old ecclesiastical, authoritarian and patriarchal structure; encourage women and youth leaders to participate fully in the life and mission of the PROK; and strengthen ecumenical solidarity with Asian churches.

The three responders to Rev. Yoon's presentation, Rev. Dr. Xiaoling Zhu of Common Global Ministries, UCC-USA/Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Hsu Hsin-Te of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, and Mr. Lutz Drescher of Evangelisches Missionswerk in Sudwestdeutschland (EMS) reaffirmed their churches' ecumenical solidarity with the PROK and resolved to take further steps toward the realization of the common goals for partnership.

In small groups, participants discussed the significant challenges to Christianity with which churches must contend. They highlighted the polarization among people and classes in society; the impact of unequal economic opportunities among countries and the consequent influx of migrant workers in highly industrialized countries; the misuse of political, economic and cultural powers of dominating countries; wars of aggression waged against weaker nations.

The Consultation served as a venue for sharing ideas and experiences of ecumenical partnership to shed light on the issues surrounding partnerships. Ecumenical partnership is understood as a means of addressing and counteracting the unprecedented impact of global, national and local social currents on the lives of individuals and communities. Specifically, common partnership initiatives can take the form of cooperation for reconciliation and unification; creating more space for understanding other religions; working together and living in solidarity; creating a community of men and women and promoting gender equality; and addressing issues of justice for minority groups.

International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia

On May 2-4, 2006, more than 100 participants representing churches and ecumenical organizations in Asia, Europe and North America gathered at PROK Academy House, Seoul, to articulate a theological vision of peace and to formulate concrete decisions to guide the churches' work for peace in North-East Asia and beyond. The Consultation was held under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK), and Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).

The Consultation stood in the spirit of the conferences first held in Tozanso, Japan in 1984 followed by meetings in Glion, Switzerland and in other places, which were initiated by the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia to address the issue of peace in North-East Asia.

In his keynote address Rev. Dr. S. Wesley Ariarajah, Professor of Ecumenical Theology at Drew University, Madison, NJ, USA, urged participants to understand peace as the central concern and mission of the church in today's world. He also reiterated that "the biblical vision of peace or shalom is both inclusive and comprehensive; it is for and about all people and indeed the whole creation".

Bible study resource person Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, Professor of Mission and Peace at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MI, USA, urged that "the well-being

of one depends on the well-being of all," and that "it is time for us to lift up our vision of interdependent life - in this world, in all its fullness, for all God's children."

Mr. Muto Ichiyo, founder and Co-President of People's Plan Study Group, Japan, pointed out in his presentation that one of the keys to establishing peace in North-East Asia is the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. He also, however, identified further obstacles to peace and stability in North-East Asia: the power struggle between Japan and China; the Taiwan issue; the tension between Japan and North Korea; and [tension] between the U.S. and North Korea.

In his presentation, Dr. Park Kyung-seo, Ambassador-At-Large for Human Rights, ROK, emphasized the role of churches as peacemakers in society. He proposed that, in order to share resources with the suffering North Korean people, an ecumenical consortium be set up for the social development of North Korea.

Through the keynote address, Bible study, presentations, responses and group discussions, the participants came to a common understanding that "peacemaking is not part of our mission; it is our mission in our day."

On the last day of the Consultation, on the basis of their common understanding of peace, the participants adopted a final statement highlighting the following points:

- Despite the end of the cold war the North-East Asian region still does not experience peace. Under the armistice agreement the division of North and South Korea still remains as a legacy of the cold war. It continues to be a destabilizing factor in the region.
- The U.S. *strategic flexibility* policy as applied to North-East Asia endangers the region more than it contributes to its security. In the global US strategy, Okinawa and the expanded Pyongtaek military base in South Korea are given special geopolitical prominence as major hubs of its military operations. This may lead to situations in which people of various countries in North-East Asia become involved in military operations initiated by the US without their consent.
- Encouraged by the progress made after the June 15 Joint Declaration of the 2000 South Korea-North Korea Summit, the people of North-East Asia are building a foundation for peace by embracing opportunities for cooperation, exchange and solidarity.
- Christians are called to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized and seek cooperation with all people committed to peace and reconciliation in East Asia.

The final statement also proposed that:

- the CCA strengthen the North-East Asia Peace and Security Working Group;
- materials for peace education and training be shared among the churches in North-East Asia;
- the NCCK invite churches in South Korea and churches and Christian agencies around the world to join in a consortium for the social development of North Korea;
- the NCCK write a petition to US President Bush, urging Bush to refrain from preemptive attacks on North Korea and Iran, lift the sanctions against North Korea, and initiate a peace agreement to replace the North-South Korean

armistice of 1953;

- churches around the world join the Japanese churches in their campaign against revision of Article 9 of Japan's constitution.

A first-fruit of the newly formed PROK Peace Community Movement Centre (PCMC) which played a key role in organizing the Consultation, the Consultation and its follow-up is a visible expression of the PROK intent to focus its future mission thrust on the concrete search for peace in East Asia and the wider world. The PROK feels that its original objectives in initiating the Consultation are well on the way to being fulfilled: 1) The Consultation gave opportunity to explore the possibility of creating a new regional order in East Asia that promotes peace and co-existence, and viewed Korean reunification issues from the perspective of peace in the wider regional and global context. 2) The Consultation provided a platform to seek ways of cooperating for peace on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia, and to begin to develop a common theological understanding of peace and a theological response to the question of peace in the East-Asia region and beyond. 3) The Consultation gave impetus to creating an international network to promote the peace movement.

Solidarity Visit to Pyeongtaek

After the official close of the International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia, participants undertook an exposure trip on May 4th to Pyeongtaek, 70 kilometers south of Seoul, to express their solidarity with farmers and other peace activists staging their ongoing resistance to the expansion of the US military base there. The size of the present base will be tripled by 2008 when the US completes its transfer of forces from front-line areas as part of its worldwide military strategic flexibility policy. (PROK E-News April 2006, March 2006, November 2005)

May 4th, however, marked the day the government had determined to end permitted protests, and the Consultation participants were, as expected, blocked by police from entering the disputed farm area. Standing face-to-face with the lines of police, the group held a prayer meeting for justice and peace in Korea and specifically for the protesting farmers and peace activists. One participant read a prepared solidarity statement, and another raised a heartfelt prayer not only for those suffering the pain of this tragic situation but also for the leaders of state who must steer the nation through these difficult days of the Korea-US alliance.

In the final Statement adopted by the Peace Consultation, participants encouraged the churches in Korea, Japan and the US "to organize exposure trips for US citizens to visit the military bases in Pyeongtaek, South Korea and in Okinawa." By first undertaking a part of this journey of solidarity themselves, they could now more clearly envision the hoped-for impact of such visits by their American sisters and brothers.

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