

PROK E-NEWS October 2006

1. PROK issues its view on the nuclear test by North Korea

The day after North Korea carried out its forewarned nuclear test on October 9th, the PROK Peace and Reunification Committee issued its comment, abridged below:

Our church, which has continuously prayed for peace on the Korean peninsula, has already made clear our position that "peace can not be achieved by weapons." [PROK July 7, 2006 statement on the July 5 missile test-launching by North Korea] However, we are very distressed to learn that North Korea, in spite of the expressed concern and apprehension of international society, conducted a nuclear test on October 9th.

Believing that the problem of the North Korean nuclear issue is due to the conflict between North Korea and the US, we have prayed that this matter be resolved through peaceful resolution of the conflict between North Korea and the US and the normalization of relations between them. The PROK has consistently called for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We are therefore very seriously considering the current situation, and strongly urge the related parties the following:

First, North Korea must change its thinking that peace can be achieved through armed force. Because the use of weapons will destroy not only North Korea but others as well, North Korea must make every effort to solve this problem through dialogue, in order to achieve lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

Second, the US must realize and acknowledge that its policy of exerting severe pressure on North Korea led the North to develop nuclear weapons as its only choice, and the US must seek to resolve this problem through genuine dialogue.

Third, the South Korean government must recognize that this situation is a matter of the very survival of the whole Korean people, and must therefore not deal with it emotionally, but rather must, with patient perseverance, make every effort to work for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula through peaceful, diplomatic means.

2. PROK 91st General Assembly

The 91st General Assembly of the PROK was held September 19-22, 2006 in Dong-Suwon Church in Suwon City, taking the words of Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord," as its theme, and guided by the scripture

passages of Joshua 24:14-18, John 13:14-15, and 1 Peter 4:10 in policy deliberations, worship and fellowship. The 700 delegates elected Rev. Yang Tae-Yoon (PROK Vice-Moderator 2005-6, and senior minister of Kunsan Seongkwang Church in Kunsan) as Moderator; Rev. Im Myoung-Kyu (senior minister of Nambu Sanyongho Church in Pusan) as ordained Vice-Moderator; and Elder Suh Mi-Sook (past President of the PROK National Church Women's Association) as lay Vice-Moderator. Elder Suh Mi-Sook is the third woman in PROK history to hold the position of lay Vice-Moderator, bringing considerable leadership experience from her past roles as Vice-Chair of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), and President of the Women's Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches, among others.

One noteworthy decision of the Assembly was the acceptance of the proposal brought by the PROK Constitution Committee to establish a national General Assembly-level Gender Justice Committee, to be launched by the 92nd General Assembly in 2007 after the Constitution Committee determines the regulations and participant composition during this next year. At the past several General Assemblies the national-level Laity Committee, comprised of representatives of the PROK National Church Women's Association, National Church Men's Association, and National Church Youth Association, has proposed that a) 30% of the voting delegates to the General Assembly be women; and b) 30% of the elders of local churches be women. Each time, however, the General Assembly has rejected the first proposal without debate; and while giving a positive assessment of the latter, declared it would be impossible to enforce it at the local congregation level. Consequently, no progress has been made on that issue. The agreement this year to establish a national-level Gender Justice Committee is thus a very significant step forward, as this Committee will be able to raise the issue of fair gender representation among delegates, on committees, and in other areas of church life.

The Closing Statement of the 91st General Assembly, covering the year until the next General Assembly in 2007, highlighted the theme of serving. Some main points: In the year 2003 when we held our Jubilee Celebration, we proclaimed 'grace, life, and serving' as our Jubilee Faith. Since then, each ensuing General Assembly has taken one of these as its core theme [in 2004, grace; 2005, life; 2006, serving]. We thus embrace our mission task as one of serving. If we are to be a church community that follows the way of Jesus the Servant, we must remember God's call to care for and serve one another. ...In this era of triumphalism and conquest, we fear that the relationship between nations will face terrible consequences if there is no guarantee of equal rights among nations. We will thus continue to pray for peaceful relations among all nations. ... As globalization accelerates, exacerbating social polarization, we must overcome this challenge which is destroying the original social, human system that God gave us. ... As a servant church, we must recover our original identity and regain society's trust. As the Korean church approaches the 100th anniversary of the "Great Awakening Movement" of 1907, we declare this to be not just an impetus for church growth; we will seize this opportunity to recover the original identity of our church and regain our mission stance of serving Christ. ... This 91st General Assembly will give our utmost to establishing God's peace in our land and peace on earth through serving God.

3. PROK shares with the North

Having over recent past years extended a sharing hand to our suffering sisters and brothers in North Korea, the PROK is sending a further shipment of aid to the North. After sending a letter of prayer and solidarity to the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) following terrible flooding in the North, the Chair and a few members of the PROK Peace and Reunification Committee met with representatives of the KCF at Mt. Kumgang in the North on August 29th, pledging support which was later given a specific figure of 100 million Won in the form of 320 tons of wheat, made possible by the response to an appeal to all our congregations. On September 30th a small group of PROK leaders and others met at Incheon Harbour to dedicate the first shipment of 40 tons of wheat, in a worship service and ceremony on the dock beside the ship being loaded at that very moment. They were joined by the Chair and representatives of the "Korea NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea", through which the shipment is being sent. Since then, further shipments are sent once every week, with the goal of completing our full shipment by the end of October. The nuclear test conducted by the North on October 9th has not stopped this flow of caring support.

4. PROK-UCCP Partner Consultation

A three-day partnership consultation between the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) held on October 10-12, 2006 in Manila has deepened and broadened the relationship between the two churches. The theme, "God's Transforming Grace, and the Diaconal Church" guided the conversations of the nineteen participants, eight from the PROK and eleven from the UCCP. The consultation was a valuable opportunity to review the partnership covenant since its inception in 2002 and to share stories about the life and work of the two churches, particularly in the context of recent developments on the Korean Peninsula and in the Philippines.

In their final statement of the consultation, the participants affirmed that in walking through the history of the two respective countries and churches, they discerned the similarities in social situations under globalization. They expressed their dismay that despite international concern and warnings, the North Korean government conducted a nuclear test in defiance of the economic and political stranglehold which the United States and its allies have imposed for more than half a century, driving the North Korean people into poverty and deprivation. They linked the unabated extra-judicial killings in the Philippines to US anti-terror policy, voicing their grief over the most recent slaying of Bishop Alberto Ramento of the Philippine Independent Church, with which the UCCP is in partner relationship. They called on the US to transform its antagonistic policies and to promote peace and unity in the world. While giving thanks for the concrete expression of the partnership through exchange of personnel, ministries of justice and peace, mission to migrant workers, and participation in such major church activities as the General Assembly meetings, the participants recognized the need to seek new ways of strengthening this still young partnership, clarify goals and objectives, and develop follow-up mechanisms. In accepting this challenge, they resolved to jointly initiate programs in the area of justice and peace; agricultural productivity and rural development; empowerment

of youth, women and men; employment, enterprise development and migrant ministry; and theological education and leadership development. The two churches will pursue the above mission tasks through continued sharing of mission co-workers, dialogue and consultations, and through establishing a UCCP-PROK Working Group to ensure appropriate follow-up of the consultation and that priority programs as agreed upon are implemented.

For several hours during the consultation the participants moved from their indoor deliberations to the teeming streets of Manila to inaugurate a new UCCP ministry among street children, a centre offering educational and recreational opportunities and emergency shelter for these young ones living at the edge of society. The new center is made possible by the initiative and funding of the PROK National Men's Association. After the consultation, the PROK participants witnessed first-hand the devastating poverty of those who live on Smoky Mountain, a former garbage dump which reached literal mountain proportions. The heart-piercing impact of this experience further sharpened their commitment to working with partners in the Philippines and around the world for peace and fullness of life for all.

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