

PROK E-NEWS

December 2006

PROK in Focus

1. *See Your Salvation Comes!* A Christmas Message

Dear readers of PROK E-News,

Christmas is the season of the year filled with expectation and hope. In every corner of the world people continue to have good hope for a better stake in life. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 62: 6-12 urgently entreats his people to work for the restoration of Jerusalem, for the Lord has decided to restore it so that she will be a sign to all around. The promise is that the enemy will never again be in a position to eat and drink that which rightly belongs to Israel. This declaration of what God will do in Jerusalem is an encouragement to people who feel weary and despondent. Isaiah reminds the people that they must be persistent in their faith, and reminds God also to take no rest until Jerusalem is established. As we approach and celebrate Christmas, let us be reminded that God's salvation is not just coming in the days ahead but it is operating right now in the world. This season, we are encouraged to reflect on how we can fully participate in God' saving action together with the struggling peoples and nations. In celebrating Christmas may we find creative ways of expressing the very essence of the birth of Jesus Christ in the world. He was not born in our imagined glorious and magnificent "Jerusalem" but in a manger in humble Bethlehem. May peace and love reign in every heart and community this Christmas and the whole year through.

Rev. Yang Tae-Yoon, Moderator, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK); and
PROK E-News Editorial Team: Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, Rev. Shin Seung-Min, Rev. Bae Gwang-Jin, Rev.
Frank Hernando, Ms. Mary Collins

2) An Evening of Peace

"Where are you, God, when there are people who suffer violence, who are maimed and killed for their beliefs and for their wish to live in peace?" is one of the lines in a prayer offered by a woman participant during the peace forum "Voices for Peace", initiated by The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) Peace Community Movement Center (PCMC) on the evening of December 5, 2006 at the NCKK auditorium in Seoul. The community that gathered listened to four witnesses.

The first witness was a representative of the struggling farmers' organization in Daechuri, Pyeongtaek. The witness told the gathered community that they are still holding candle prayer vigils in Pyeongtaek as a continuing protest action against their forced ejection from the farm lands that they till, to give way for the expansion of the U.S. military base in the area. One of their leaders, Kim Ji-Tae, was given a two-year prison sentence for obstruction of civil affairs, because of his leading role in their protracted protest action. Amnesty International has listed him as a prisoner of conscience. On this evening of December 5, the witness requested the gathered community to pray for peace, particularly for restoration of their farmland to the farmers.

‘When will this end?’ was one of the questions raised by the witness to the political killings in the Philippines. The unabated killings in the South-East Asian country was explained by Rev. Frank Hernando, mission co-worker with the PROK from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). He pointed out that government security officers have given a special chain of command to motorcycle-riding, bonnet-clad assassins of labor leaders, church workers, lawyers, journalists and farmers. This spate of political killings is linked with the US war on terror which the government of President Gloria Arroyo supports in collusion with the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The hysteria on the part of the political left “front organizations” of the government and the military has fallen on not fewer than 756 persons suspected as leaders and members of these “front organizations.” Rev. Hernando anticipated that the killings will stop when the perpetrators and masterminds of the killings are prosecuted and penalized, and peace talks between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front are resumed. He urged that all peacemakers, including participants in the December 5 peace forum, pray for peace and justice in the Philippines and support the families of victims of the extrajudicial killings.

Two young conscientious objectors gave a third witness, about the Korean government policy that every young male citizen of the country must render not less than two years of required military service. This policy has been accepted as a means of safeguarding the security and peace of South Korea. The only religious sect that opposes military conscription in South Korea is the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who consider allegiance to the country or even just its emblem as tantamount to idolatry. They are thus considered conscientious objectors to military conscription. Recently, however, not only Jehovah’s Witnesses but also some Buddhists, Christians and peace activists have raised their objection and more than 1,000 persons have been imprisoned for resisting military service. The penalty is 18 months imprisonment, and they will have a criminal record. The young witnesses asked the gathered community to pray for peace in the Korean peninsula and for a change of policy regarding military service.

Finally, vivid witness to the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict was given by a staff member of ‘Solidarity for Peace for Palestine’, based in Seoul. He mentioned the military check points that people must go through when they visit family members in the Palestinian territories passing through Israeli controlled areas. Almost every day, violence erupts on the streets; illegal arrests and detention and bombings in public places are all too common. The witness asked participants to include in their prayers peace and stability in Palestine and a solution to the ongoing conflict in Palestine.

The Evening of Peace was concluded with the pledge of commitment to work for peace and justice, read in one voice by the officers and members of the Peace Community Movement Center, and with the concluding prayer given by Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, General Secretary of the PROK.

Ecumenical Movement in Focus

1. New NCKK General Secretary inaugurated

On November 30 of this year leaders, ministers and lay people of member denominations of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) gathered for the service of inauguration of the newly elected General Secretary of the NCKK. The position of NCKK General Secretary is filled by each member denomination on a rotating basis, and with the completion of the term of Rev. Paik Do-Woong of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), it was now the turn of the PROK to fill this seat. The candidate put forward by the PROK, Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung, was elected by the NCKK General Assembly on November 20.

In his inaugural greeting, Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung made several significant points. 1) The NCKK will

reactivate the international ecumenical network for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula and in North-East Asia. 2) The NCKK will honour and carry forward its historic tradition of advocacy for human rights and democracy, to be a prophetic voice of the Korean churches. 3) Rev. Kwon will encourage the NCKK to open the door of NCKK membership, limited until now to denomination-based churches, to grassroots ecumenical organizations (for example, the Korean Student Christian Federation, Ecumenical Youth Council of Korea, YMCA) and local regional ecumenical bodies. 4) The NCKK will work hard to develop and strengthen ecumenical leadership.

We express our thanks to former General Secretary Rev. Paik Do-Woong for his years of service in this position, and pray that God guide him as he moves into new avenues of ministry. At the same time, we pray that God's guiding love give Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung clarity of vision and strength of conviction as he leads the NCKK in ever-new direction and ministry.

2. 'Ecumenical Consortium for Peace Building and Social Development on the Korean Peninsula' launched

On December 8, 2006 in Hong Kong the 'Ecumenical Consortium for Peace Building and Social Development on the Korean Peninsula' (otherwise referred to as the Ecumenical Consortium) was launched through its first meeting, attended by 25 participants representing churches and ecumenical bodies around the world. Mr. Erich Weingartner, an independent consultant on international and humanitarian affairs, specializing in the DPRK, and the first NGO representative to achieve residency in Pyongyang, and Dr. Park Kyung-seo, former WCC Executive Secretary for Asia, participated as key resource persons. Unfortunately, due to the recent political developments resulting from North Korea's nuclear test on early October, the delegates from the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) in North Korea could not attend the meeting.

The formation of the Ecumenical Consortium was first proposed by the International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia (Ecumenical Consultation on Peace) sponsored by the WCC, CCA, NCKK and PROK and held in Seoul on May 2-4, 2006.

Since North and South Korean Christians first met in 1986 in Glion, Switzerland under the auspices of the WCC, the ecumenical community around the world has prayed and worked for reconciliation and peaceful reunification in the Korean peninsula. In 1995 when serious floods ravaged North Korea, many churches and church agencies including South Korean churches began to respond to appeals for food assistance. However, after years of experience in providing food aid, the churches and agencies began to realize that the causes of the food shortage in North Korea went beyond natural disaster and agricultural input, and that there must be basic rehabilitation of the infrastructure and revival of every sector of the economy in order to overcome North Korea's chronic food shortage. Until now, however, most of the projects implemented by churches and church agencies of the ecumenical community have been reactive, responding with emergency humanitarian aid such as food assistance.

Therefore, it is in this context that the Ecumenical Consultation on Peace proposed the establishment of the Ecumenical Consortium in order to consolidate the ongoing work as well as future projects of the ecumenical community with a long-term vision of social development in North Korea. The Ecumenical Consortium aims to:

1. strengthen information-sharing within the ecumenical community and promote ecumenical participation in the peace and reconciliation movement in the Korean peninsula as well as in North-East Asia;
2. encourage the ecumenical community around the world to share their resources;

3. mobilize the limited resources of the ecumenical community in a more systematic and effective way to support social development in the DPRK;
4. assist the DPRK to build its own capacity for sustainable and alternative social development;
5. support the Christian community in North Korea to make its life more visible.

In the Hong Kong meeting of the Ecumenical Consortium, the participating churches and bodies adopted the Terms of Reference and appointed eight people, including one representative of the NCKK and one representative of the KCF, to the newly-formed Steering Group. The secretariat office will be located in the NCKK office with part-time staff. It was agreed that the first projects will be a solar-panel project and a windmill-power project which will be initiated by the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) respectively.

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