

## **PROK E-NEWS March 2007**

### ***PROK in Focus***

#### **1. Lenten prayer-fast opposing US-Korea FTA**

Many PROK ministers and lay people, including youth, are holding a forty-day Lenten Prayer Fast in opposition to the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the U.S. and South Korea. The current 8<sup>th</sup> session of the official FTA negotiations began on June 5, 2006 and the two governments hope to finalize the agreement by the end of this month. The PROK prayer-fast which began on March 1st and will continue until April 9th, follows the wilderness experience of Jesus Christ who fasted in prayer for forty days, resisting the temptations of the devil.

This prayer action is in solidarity with other civil society groups and labour and farmer organizations around the country also staging protests against the FTA.

The prayer-fast was initiated by the PROK Association of Rural Church Ministers and is supported and participated in by PROK grassroots organizations and individuals. On a rotating basis, an ever-changing core group of twelve persons, their number symbolizing the twelve disciples of Jesus, fast and pray, each person for one day, through the forty-day period; in the end, a total of at least 480 people will have thus prayed and fasted. While the core-twelve participants fast and pray while carrying on their regular activities in their own homes or places of work, two PROK ministers coordinate this PROK national prayer-fast from a small house beside the PROK General Assembly office where they are residing from beginning to end of the prayer-fast. These two leaders are themselves fasting totally or partially; Rev. Lee Tae-Young, Director of the PROK Christian Institute for Rural Development, and Rev. Yeo Tae-Kwon, minister of Yoolkok Church in rural North-East Cholla Presbytery, have each fasted fully for 12 days, and now, until April 9th, are eating only two simple meals per day.

In this small house on the grounds of the PROK General Assembly, a prayer-service is held every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evening during this 40-day prayer-fast, to intercede for those whose suffering will increase under the FTA. Each prayer-service is led and participated in by advocates for different vulnerable sectors of society.

Believing that an increasing number of people will be disadvantaged by the FTA, the prayer-fast leaders and participants base their opposition to the FTA on the following anticipated outcome:

First, the FTA will increase South Korea's economic dependency on the US, aside from the long history of military and national security dependency that continues to divide Korean society. Second, the FTA ensures South Korea's importation of beef, rice and other agricultural products, posing an overwhelming threat to Korean agricultural production and to the livelihood of Korean farmers who will be further impoverished. Third, removal of its tariffs on imported cars, industrial goods and other products will result in a glut of imported products and will slow down industrial productivity, resulting in economic regression for South Korea. Fourth, the FTA will allow further intrusion of foreign firms gaining large, tax-free profits, leaving South Korean firms vulnerable to foreign takeover.

The Lenten Prayer Fast focuses on Korean farmers threatened by the impending agricultural trade liberalization; non-regular workers on contract with limited benefits; women and children living in poverty in cities and countryside; foreign migrant workers who are exploited and discriminated against; women in entertainment services in areas adjacent to US military bases. In addition, the participants pray for justice beyond Korean borders as well. They intercede for the families of victims of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines; for the victims of armed conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Israel. They pray for creation groaning under the destructive impact of aggressive development that imperils human and animal life and the natural environment; in one specific example, they pray that the threatened natural beauty Kyeyang Mountain in Incheon City be preserved (next article, below). They pray for personal repentance as well, recognizing that each of us must seek wholeness and integrity as true children of God.

In addition to those who fast and pray, many others around the country are praying even if they cannot fast. Surely God hears these prayers that peace, justice and reconciliation may be experienced by all God's people and all God's creation.

## **2. Protest to protect Kyeyang Mountain continues**

Environmentalists continue their struggle to protect the natural beauty of Kyeyang Mountain in Incheon City against the plan of the Lotte Construction Company to convert a large area of this mountain sanctuary into a golf course. Rev. Yoon In-Joong, introduced in the January '07 PROK E-News, unwaveringly maintains his vigil in the high branches of a 20-metre pine tree where he has continuously resided, never descending to the ground, since December 20, 2006. Supported by fellow protesters from environmental NGOs and local PROK churches who camp, on a rotational basis, beside the tree, Rev. Yoon In-Joong receives encouragement also from the visits and prayers of PROK church leaders and members, and even from the overseas ecumenical network. The National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) added the voices of Japanese Christians to the protest through a statement issued in late February. Building on an earlier statement by the PROK Church and Society Committee (Jan/07 E-News), the NCCJ declared its support of "the peaceful protest of Rev. Yoon In-Joong who wants to protect and preserve the mountain as a creation of God" and called on the Incheon City government to take a long-term perspective, creating a public natural park where forest, wildlife and people may

live in harmony. Urging respect for the "preservation of life and humanity," the NCCJ concluded its statement with the prayer that "we can find ways to work together towards a world where all creation may know peace and life."

After rejecting the Lotte Company's initial plan and then considering its revised plan (Jan.'07 E-News), the Incheon City Council later again rejected the revised plan, but the hopes of Rev. Yoon and supporters were dampened when Lotte further revised its plan for re-consideration by Incheon City. Their flame of hope only dampened and not extinguished, the protestors have strengthened their resolve to protect the integrity of this corner of creation, Rev. Yoon In-Joong vowing to never descend from the tree until the safety of the mountain is promised.

### ***Ecumenical Movement in Focus***

#### **NCCK Ecumenical Consultation**

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) held a Consultation on March 12-13, 2007 in Taejon City, South-Choongcheon Province, to articulate its vision on the ecumenical movement and to discuss program plans for the next four years. This was the first consultation since the NCCK General Assembly meeting in November 2006 revised the constitution and reorganized the committees accordingly. About 100 people, including NCCK committee members, ministers, youth, and ecumenical activists, both men and women, participated in the consultation.

Dr. Ahn Jae-Woong, former CCA General Secretary, and Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung, current NCCK General Secretary, delivered the two keynote addresses. Dr. Ahn characterized the ecumenical movement as "a movement for the unity and renewal of the church," and "a movement for justice, peace and the integrity of creation." Reflecting on the weaknesses and strengths of the Korean ecumenical movement over the past few decades, Rev. Kwon strongly challenged the participants to:

- articulate a firm theological vision on such critical issues as globalization, ecology, peace, reconciliation;
- provide grass-roots church members with faith-based guidelines for action for peace and justice, which will make the ecumenical movement relevant to them;
- develop ecumenical leadership.

The NCCK Committees, in their group discussions, made the following suggestions and proposals:

The Justice and Peace Committee suggested the formation of "a Christian committee to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the June 1987 Great Democratic Struggle", to serve as a platform for preparing for the presidential election to be held in December 2007. The Committee also discussed how to strengthen the ongoing campaign for the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence.

The Faith and Order Committee decided to produce a series of publications to help church members understand the basic concept and history of the ecumenical movement. The Committee will initiate various public forums to reflect the

relationship between state and church, and is considering producing a "NCKK policy statement on the presidential election of December 2007".

The Gender Justice Committee proposed the publication of a gender-justice guideline document in July 2007 to be widely distributed to the member churches for reflection and comment. The Committee also plans to cooperate with the Life and Theology Committee in developing theological guidelines on ecological issues.

Appreciating the importance of the international ecumenical network, the Reconciliation and Peace Committee proposed a project of "Ecumenical Peace Visits" through which the Korean church can learn first-hand about various peace movements in the world.

While some decisions can be implemented immediately, other suggestions and proposals made during the Consultation will be presented to the NCKK Executive Committee for further discussion.

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