

PROK E-NEWS April 2007

1. PROK women appeal to US partners to support House Resolution 121

Increasingly alarmed by recent actions and pronouncements by Japanese leaders, and encouraged by responses from several governments around the world, the PROK National Church Women's Association sent a letter on April 13th to PROK partner churches in the US urging their members to lobby for support of a resolution on the issue of women forced by Japan into sexual slavery during World War II. The letter was a specific follow-up to a similar appeal sent by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) to the National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA (NCCC-USA).

Expressing their appreciation for the support of US partners for PROK ministries among vulnerable sectors of Korean society and for our joint work with partners around the globe for justice and peace around the world, the PROK women wrote: "Strengthened by this unity in Christ, the women of the PROK appeal to our sisters and brothers in partner churches in the USA to join us in action and prayer that a resolution introduced to the US House of Representatives on January 31st of this year will be brought to the floor and passed. This is House Resolution 121 introduced by Congressman Mike Honda, calling on the Japanese government to officially and unequivocally apologize and take historical responsibility for the forcible sexual enslavement of women during the Second World War. As you know, while the majority of the victims of this horror were Korean, the women were forcibly taken from other Asian countries, including then-Dutch colonies, as well. The suffering of these sisters is beyond our imagination, and those still living today, from among the original number of as many as 200,000 women, can experience some degree of healing and hope through action taken around the world to ensure that Japan unambiguously apologize and take responsibility for its past actions." In their letter, the PROK women expressed their deep concern about Japan's moves toward remilitarization, culminating in efforts to revise the Peace Constitution.

The PROK women deeply appreciated receiving prompt and positive responses. Through a letter received April 16th, they were assured that the Common Global Ministries Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, receiving their letter during their April board meeting, "decided that both Co-Executive Ministers of CGMB will issue a support letter to you and also publish on our website a call to both Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ church members to show their support by going to their Congressmen and women offices to encourage them to support the House Resolution 121." On the same day, the women also received a letter promising that "your communication will be shared with our Disciple Women's network and as

a result thousands will be petitioning their congress people to pass Resolution 121."

The Presbyterian Church (USA) responded by immediately sending a letter to Ms. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives, asking for her strong support of House Resolution 121, writing that the successful passage of this Resolution "would be a great source of support to the abused women and their survivors, as well as a message of courage and hope to all women of current and future generations around the world."

Surely these actions are one more evidence of the strength and joy we experience in our unity in Christ as one ecumenical church family around the world, working together for justice and peace.

2. PROK sends message of prayerful solidarity

Stunned by the devastating tragedy of the fatal shooting of students and professors of Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia on April 16th, the PROK added its voice of prayerful support to the many such voices raised around the world. While represented among the member churches of the NCKK in the letter of condolence sent by the NCKK to the NCCC-USA, the PROK wrote directly to our three partner churches in the US. Expressing the "deep sorrow and shock all leaders and members of The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) share with our American brothers and sisters over the tragic loss of life and injury suffered..." the PROK General Secretary continued, "Our pain deepened even further when we learned that this tragedy was inflicted by a Korean student..... [I] extend to you and all members of your church our expression of prayerful solidarity in this time of immeasurable grief. Although no words can adequately comfort those who grieve, we pray and trust that our sisters and brothers will be upheld and strengthened by the unfailing and steadfast love of our God who binds us together as one family." The response received from John H. Thomas, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ expresses the mutual strength in ecumenical solidarity: "It is good to be reminded of the global family that embraces us in times such as these. Just as sorrow knows no borders, so also is the reality that deeply troubled souls who may be tempted to turn to violence carry the passports of many nations, including our own. May this tragedy renew in both of our churches a commitment to overcome violence and to minister to those whose spirits yearn so desperately for the Gospel of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace."

3. Youth and church workers study peacemaking

From April through June 2007 the PCMC is offering two modules of a six-session "Peacemaking Course" for PROK church workers and for PROK youth. While the curriculum content for both is the same, the resource leaders gear their approach to the varying backgrounds and interests of the participants. Designed and drafted uniquely for this purpose by Rev. Frank Hernando, ecumenical co-worker commissioned to the PROK from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and part-time staff of the PCMC, the course is co-led by Rev. Hernando and

Mr, Hyun Sun-Do, full-time staff of the PCMC, in both English and Korean. Seven church workers and seven youth have enrolled in the two respective modules.

The objectives of the course are to enable participants to:

1. Articulate existing issues and concerns on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula.
2. Distinguish facets of peacemaking that encourage people to participate in peacemaking.
3. Correlate peace issues with such basic concerns as political-military conflict, self-determination, environmental destruction, and the impact of globalization.
4. Integrate the learned understanding of peace and reunification into local church educational, witness and service programs.

Through a variety of creative and participatory teaching-learning methods, participants and resource-leaders together are delving into the six main topics of:

1. Social environment scanning of South Korea and the Agenda for Peace
2. Biblico-theological reflection on peace and reunification
3. Historical review of peace and reunification initiatives in the Korean peninsula
4. The role of the church in the reunification of the Korean peninsula
5. Peace movements in Korea and their impact on peace and reunification processes
6. Peacemaking as ministry

Participants in the course for youth are mainly leading members of the PROK National Youth Association which traditionally has taken a prophetically active stance in justice and reunification and peace issues. In the first session in the second week of April, invited to articulate their definitions of peace, the young people defined peace as: "living in freedom, and in harmony with nature, accepting each other with our differences"; "country of God"; "breath"; "understanding and respecting one another"; "good relations between people, and between people and God and creation"; "fair sharing"; "fullness of life". Brainstorming on current pressing issues, the young people's list included militarization of Japan; US-Korea Free Trade Agreement and proposed FTAs between Korea and other countries; North Korean nuclear development and testing program; non-regular workers; upcoming South Korean presidential election; conflict in and polarization of society; neo-liberal economic strategy. A vigorous discussion followed, elaborating on these issues. At the end of the session, the young participants began drafting an agenda for peace, a dream that 1) more young people will understand the real meaning of peace and join the peace movement; 2) more churches will provide their members with peace education; 3) more people will understand the meaning of non-violent communication; 4) people may recognize their own strengths and thus recognize and respect the strengths of others. Over the next five sessions the young people will refine their agenda for peace into more specific form.

The older adult church workers are similarly pursuing their studies and agenda for peace, seizing this important opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of

peace and to formulate relevant actions for peacemaking as a basic element of their ministry.

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