

## **Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen - Nachrichten**

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### **Letter to President Lee Myung-bak of the Republic of Korea**

Geneva, 1 July 2008

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is greatly encouraged by the recent progress that has been made in multilateral efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons programmes. The decision of the North Korean government to submit an inventory of nuclear plants and materials and subsequently the demolition of the cooling tower in the nuclear complex at Yongbyon, are clear indications that the six party-talks have proceeded a step further.

It is also heartening to receive the news that the United States administration is lifting sanctions against North Korea and removing the country from its list of countries that sponsor terrorism. These signs encourage us to believe that the steps taken by the various parties as agreed in the six-party talks will pave the way for overcoming the remaining obstacles to completing negotiations aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear programme. In fact, these developments are important progresses towards the ultimate goal of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. This recent development needs to be seen, both politically and symbolically, as North Korea's clear commitment to dismantling its nuclear programme in the near future.

While congratulating all those who have been involved in the six-party talks on their efforts in leading the process through multilateral diplomacy, Your Excellency, I would urge you to take urgent measures to strengthen inter-Korean relationships without any pre-conditions being demanded by your government.

The World Council of Churches has been monitoring the situation on the Korean Peninsula for the past several decades. The "engagement policy" with its emphasis on "reconciliation and cooperation, peace and co-prosperity" initiated by the leadership of two successive South Korean governments contributed to the easing of tensions in the Korean Peninsula. The policy and dynamics of inter-Korean cooperation developed by South Korea during the past decade have made unprecedented progress in inter-Korean relations and have helped to generate important confidence-building measures. However, the new South Korean government's policy towards North Korea reflected in your inaugural speech of "Denuclearisation, Opening and Vision 3000" is cause for concern and disappointment as it negates the spirit of the joint declarations made by the two Koreas in the recent past.

Your Excellency, we see this shift in South Korea's policy toward North Korea as potentially hindering the efforts for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula. It is in this context, on behalf of the World Council of Churches and its member constituencies all over the world, that I urge you to take all possible measures to avoid any deterioration of inter-Korean relations.

The WCC member constituencies in South Korea have already expressed their concerns on this recent policy development, which is being promoted by your administration. The World Council of Churches shares the concerns expressed by the South Korean churches about your government's policies on North Korea, and we urge you to respond creatively to the positive gesture demonstrated by the North Korean government last week.

It is our sincere hope, Your Excellency, that your government will soon devise a policy framework that could make qualitative improvements in North-South Korea relations and thereby promote lasting peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The World Council of Churches has repeatedly reaffirmed our support for the UN initiatives to eliminate all nuclear arms and the full terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). At the same time we have joined the people praying and yearning for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. In 2004, the World Council of Churches' Executive Committee offered the following prayer:

*We cry to you out of the depths of despair over the division of Korea,*

*Which is the victim of a divided world.*

*You came to this world as a Servant of Peace,*

*You provide love and peace.*

*You commanded us to love each other...*

*You have given us signs of hope in the midst of despair.*

I end with these words of intercession said during the World Day of Prayer for Peace, while I assure Your Excellency of our continued solidarity in all the efforts towards a unified, reconciled and peaceful Korea.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia  
WCC general secretary