1. Statement on North Korea’s missile tests
On July 7, two days after North Korea shook the world by test-launching seven missiles, the PROK, through its Peace Community Movement Centre (PCMC), responded with a statement shared with partners in Korea and around the world. Insisting that “peace can not be achieved by weapons,” the PCMC entreated the North Korean government not to seek peace and security by strengthening military force, and to recognize that only cooperation and dialogue based on mutual trust can achieve peace and security. It called on the South Korean government to strengthen its relations with North Korea through cooperation and dialogue, citing its conviction that in crisis is hope. And it urged concerned countries to normalize their diplomatic relations with North Korea as an imperative for establishing peace. The PROK through the PCMC re-affirmed its “commitment to building mutual trust among nations in North-East Asia and to working for the ultimate realization of a peace agreement on the Korean peninsula and the disarmament of the region.”

Within hours of receiving the PROK statement, the World Council of Churches issued a letter to WCC member churches in Korea and the NCCK, reiterating its commitment to peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula, and calling on churches and the ecumenical movement to encourage a course of engagement and mutual trust as the only course to this ultimate goal. Declaring its endorsement of the July 7 appeal of the PROK to all concerned countries “...to transform the current situation of conflict into a constructive process towards peace,” the WCC affirmed that this appeal “is a reminder to us that Christians...should be bearers of the light of hope amidst the prevailing gloom of despondency.”

2. Relief Support for Indonesian earthquake victims
Within days of the earthquake which devastated Jogyakarta and Central Java in Indonesia on May 27th, the PROK sent a letter of prayer and solidarity to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI). A report subsequently received from the CCI drew a staggering picture of the loss of life and property and the immense challenges facing survivors and those who would help them. Particularly, the report listed the most urgent needs of the victims as:
- small-sized tents for temporary shelter;
- light drugs such as painkillers, antidiarrhea and antifebric;
- volunteers and financial support for the reconstruction of the demolished houses.
On June 11-14, two representatives of the PROK and NCCK visited the devastated area of Yogyakarta and met with the leaders of the CCI to express the support of Korean Christians. The PROK and NCCK offered a small fund to purchase temporary tents for the families of Jongrangan village where the houses of all 33 families were completely destroyed by the earthquake. Reporting that as many as 37 churches in the Jogyakarta area were totally or partially destroyed, the CCI asked the PROK and NCCK representatives to explore ways to support reconstruction of the two totally destroyed churches in the Bantul region of Jogyakarta.

In response to this request by the CCI, the PROK has sent out an appeal to all its member congregations to respond with financial support for the suffering people of Indonesia and to donate funds specifically for the two completely destroyed churches in the Bantul region.

Ecumenical Movement in Focus

1. Letter to President Bush
Explaining that it was mandated to do so by the International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia, held in Seoul in May 2006, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) sent a letter to US President George W. Bush on July 3, 2006 specifying three urgent concerns and exhortations of the international ecumenical church community: “First, we oppose any pre-emptive attack by the USA against North Korea and Iran. .. As Christians we believe that true peace can be achieved only through justice, reconciliation and nonviolence. Therefore, we urge you to resolve the present crisis through peaceful means inspired by the spirit of justice, reconciliation and nonviolence. Second, we urge you to lift the sanctions against North Korea. It is generally understood that the sanctions... have been enforced by the USA in its own political interest. Experts indicate that the sanctions... have been one significant cause of the increasing suffering of the North Korean people. If the USA is really serious in its wish to relieve the suffering of the North Korean people, the US government must immediately lift the sanctions against North Korea. Third, we urge you to initiate a diplomatic process to replace the armistice of 1953 with a peace agreement. Even though the cold war has ended elsewhere, the legacy of the cold war, the armistice of 1953, still dominates the geo-political situation of the Korean peninsula and the world. This has been an obstacle to the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. Achieving peaceful reunification is also one of the keys to establishing peace in North-East Asia. Therefore, we urge you to consolidate all efforts to replace the armistice of 1953 with a peace agreement.” Ending the letter with the prayer that the US “will be a critical peace-maker in the world so that all people may live in peace and harmony without threat of war,” below the signature of the NCCK President the letter listed all the 26 churches and ecumenical organizations which participated in the above-mentioned Peace Consultation.

2. North-East Asia Working Group on Peace and People’s Security, CCA
In its new identity-defining priority of working actively for peace in East Asia, the
PROK affirms the vital role of the North-East Asia Working Group on Peace and People’s Security, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), in the journey toward peace, and expects to become a core member of the Working Group in the near future.

The idea to form a North-East Asia Working Group on Peace and People's Security (NE-Asia Working Group) originated from a theological consultation on "Church and Empire" held by the Formosa Christianity and Culture Research Center (FCCRC) on October 28-30, 2004 in Taiwan. The consultation was participated in by church leaders, theologians and peace activists in Asia and Africa. The participants strongly felt the urgency to pay attention to the issue of peace and people's security in the North-East Asia region, and affirmed that the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) should play a pivotal role in coordinating the church networks of this region for this purpose.

Again in early 2005 in Taiwan, the FCCRC invited CCA representatives and General Secretaries of the National Councils of Churches in the North-East Asia region to meet together in order to concretize the ideas derived from the 2004 Taiwan consultation. In this meeting, the CCA representatives and NCC General Secretaries agreed to form the NE-Asia Working Group to develop a systematic structure that promotes peace and people's security to the church members and people in the region.

The second NE-Asia Working Group meeting was held in Tokyo on September 9-11, 2005. In this second meeting, the following three major program thrusts were identified:
Pedagogical Initiatives: school for peace, publication, lecture tour, etc.
People-to-People Alliances: regional children’s peace camp, women’s gatherings, exchange programs, etc.
Networking with civil organizations and multi-religious groups: interfaith school for peace, interfaith disaster committee, etc.

The 3rd meeting of the NE-Asia Working Group was held in June 2006 in Seoul. It was hosted by the NCCK and its member churches, in follow-up to the International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia, held in Seoul in May 2006, which strongly recommended that the churches in the region reinforce the role of the NE-Asia Working Group, developing it as a dynamic movement rather than something too institutionalized.

The participants of this 3rd meeting decided to:
increase the number of core members to up to 15 to ensure the active participation of the churches in the region;
hold the first pedagogical program, a “School for Peace”, January 23 to February 1, 2007 in Taiwan, to train the trainers of the church communities in the region;
explore the possibility of organizing a regional children’s peace camp in Korea next year to promote a spirituality of peace among children, following a similar regional children's camp held by NCCJ in Japan last year;
support the campaign led by the National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) against revision of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution, as mandated by the International Ecumenical Peace Consultation of May/06;
urge churches in the region and around the world to actively participate in the “Consortium for Social Development of North Korea” which will be formed in December, 2006, as mandated by the above-mentioned Peace Consultation of May/06.

PROK E-News is a publication of The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). Editor: Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, General Secretary