PROK E-NEWS
February 2007

PROK in Focus

1. PROK issues statement welcoming the six-party accord reached February 13, 2007

The PROK Peace and Reunification Committee issued the following statement on February 14:

We strongly welcome the accord reached yesterday, February 13, at the six-party talks in Beijing on initial actions to implement the 2005 Joint Statement on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We believe that the outcome of the six-party talks can eventually contribute to building peace in the Korean Peninsula.

Through the painful process of the six-party talks, the international community has learned a historical lesson that true peace can be realized not by words, but by concrete actions. However, we also realize that the current agreement represents only the first stage towards establishing permanent peace in the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, we urge the international community to make every effort to recover mutual trust.

We also urge those states involved in the six-party talks to develop a concrete roadmap for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and for the normalization of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the USA, and between North Korea and Japan. Particularly, we urge the Korean government to play a key role in those efforts.

We strongly hope and sincerely pray that the current agreement will provide a positive momentum for the international community to resume support for the North Korean people in their extreme need.

2. PROK holds conference on social mission policy

On February 26-27 of this year, under the theme “The future of Korean society and the role of the church”, the Church and Society Committee of the PROK General Assembly held a consultation on the social mission policy of the PROK, to articulate the PROK vision and role in Korean society and
church. About 70 ministers and lay leaders participated in the consultation and shared their views and ideas to develop a comprehensive mission policy to be presented to the upcoming 92nd General Assembly in September 2007. The participants reached a common understanding that it is a significant and urgent task for the PROK to reflect on the last 20 years’ journey towards democracy and to project a new vision to Korean society as the whole society awaits the presidential election in December this year. Particularly, the Committee came up with a strategy on how the church can play a critical role in the election campaign.

The participants also reached a consensus that the new government should make every effort to respond to the following urgent issues:

1) Peaceful reunification

2) Democracy: To achieve democracy in more comprehensive ways, the National Security Law must be abolished and the political freedom of the people must be secured. The reform of private schools initiated by the current government should be completed without any compromise. Society should continue its efforts to cleanse itself of all the legacies of earlier military regimes.

3) Autonomy: The relocation of US military bases in Korea and the Free Trade Agreement with the US should be reviewed in consideration of the sovereignty of Korean people. The Korean military forces in Iraq should be withdrawn immediately so as to respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi people.

4) Economic justice and social welfare: Various social mechanisms should be developed to reduce the widening gap between the rich and the poor. There should also be significant changes of legal and social policies to secure the rights of the 600,000 foreign migrant workers, Korean temporary workers and differently-abled people.

5) Life and ecology: Ecological issues such as climate change and global warming must be seriously addressed.

Immediately after the consultation, the Church and Society Committee held a meeting to strategize implementation of the recommendations of the Consultation. Realizing the urgency of environmental concerns, for example, the Committee decided to form a sub-committee to deal with this pressing issue.
Ecumenical Movement in Focus

North-East Asia Working Group on Peace and People’s Security, Christian Conference of Asia

The North-East Asia Working Group on Peace and People’s Security (hereafter referred to as the Working Group), has its origins in an ecumenical theological consultation on ‘Church and Empire’ held in October 2004 in Taiwan, organized by the Formosa Christianity and Culture Research Centre (FCCRC), in which the participants recognized the urgent need to work for peace and people’s security in the North-East Asia region and to create a regional solidarity network, coordinated by the CCA, for this purpose. A Round-Table Consultation was subsequently held in Japan in February 2005, where the participants asserted that “seeking people’s security should be a primary agenda of the churches in North-East Asia.” Emphasizing that security can never be ensured through military option, the participants “called for a paradigmatic change in our understanding of security: from national security, to people’s security.” By ‘people’s security’ the participants meant “an alternative security doctrine informed by the values and morals of the Kingdom of God that are contrary to the designs of the military industrial complexes and their political agents. …If they [are to] be the custodians of justice, peace and security of the people, churches in the region must play a leadership role by evolving new strategies that lead to peace.” Seeing this as “a faith mandate” of the churches, the Round-Table asked the CCA to initiate the process of setting up the Working Group.

The first meeting of the Working Group as such was held in Tokyo in September 2005, followed by a second meeting in June 2006 in Seoul, at which the official name, as in this article title above, was approved. An important impetus to the Working Group was given the previous month by the International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia, held in May 2006 in Seoul, which, in its final Statement, reinforced the role of the Working Group.

At its next meeting in February 2007 in Hong Kong, the Working Group adopted the Terms of Reference and Vision Statement, and confirmed the membership. Each of the four National Councils of Churches of Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Taiwan may name up to four members; in addition, the General Secretaries of the 4 NCCs and the CCA Executive Secretary for International Affairs are ex-officio members. The core membership will thus be a total of 16 excluding the ex-officio members. The PROK, whose active involvement began with the June 2006 meeting, is represented through Rev. Shin Seung-Min, Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Relations.

Under the Terms of Reference the main objectives are to: 1) provide new pedagogical initiatives to the churches and ecumenical community on people’s security and witness to peace; 2) promote
people-to-people alliances; and 3) encourage net-working with civil society organizations and multi-
religious groups.

One of the initial projects of the Working Group, a “Training of Trainers (School) for Peace Building and Conflict Transformation in North-East Asia” (hereafter referred to as the ‘School for Peace’) was successfully carried out in Taiwan January 23 to February 1, 2007. Seventeen young church people from Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Korea (including two from the PROK) gained new theological and practical understandings of peace-building and conflict transformation through lectures, debate and discussion, and exposure to grassroots programs. Their evaluative comments at the end of the program stressed the need “to continue this training at all levels of our churches.”

Affirming the positive evaluation of the participants, the Working Group members at their February 2007 meeting unanimously approved a proposal to hold the second ‘School for Peace’ January 23 - February 1, 2008, again in Taiwan. Other program plans adopted for the near future include:

- Hold a regional children’s peace conference August 6-10, 2007 in Korea, organized by NCCK through its member churches, and building on the experience of the NCCJ in providing a similar children’s peace conference in 2005;
- Cooperate with the NCCJ in jointly organizing an Ecumenical Conference on Article 9 of the Japanese Peace Constitution, to be held November 29 to December 1, 2007 in Tokyo;
- Open a Working Group web-site.

The web-site is now open, at www.neasiawg.org where Terms of Reference, Vision Statement, history of the Working Group and other information may be found.