



THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN KOREA

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STATEMENT

The National Council of Churches of Korea

A Call to Prayer over the Yeonpyeong Island Incident

Yet again, only months after the sinking of a South Korean warship, Choenan, the fragile peace along the dividing line between the two Koreas has been broken. The exchange of fire on Yeonpyeong on 23 November has led to the deaths of two civilians and two marines. Eighteen more people were injured and a number of homes were destroyed in and on this small island that lies only seven miles from the North Korean border and fifty miles from the densely populated Southern port city of Incheon. The fighting and the mass exodus of residents from the island that is home to a fishing community and military bases is all too reminiscent of the Korean War that inflicted pain on the Korean people that none can forget. The National Council of Churches in Korea mourns with the surviving victims and the families of those whose lives were so senselessly taken. It deplors the North Korean military for using powerful weapons against the civilian community in the most serious incident since the signing of the Armistice in 1953.

Yet again the Peninsula and its people are gripped by the fear of an escalation of ideologically-inspired violence. In its 1988 Incheon Consultation Statement on Peace and Justice, as the NCCCK we said to the nation that our country sits at the apex of hegemonic competition and diplomatic and military brinkmanship. Yet again, we in the South are reminded of the fragility of our nation's booming prosperity and of the starkly contradictory widespread poverty of the North. And once more this border clash comes in the context of joint US and South Korean naval exercises off the coast and "war games" on the Peninsula. NCCCK challenges the governments of South Korea, USA and Japan to refrain from upgrading these joint military exercises under an umbrella of the USA's respective "security alliances" because they appear to have provoked North Korea and led to its strong reaction.

As we have so often repeated in the past, these exercises of political and military brinksmanship serve no purpose other than to escalate tensions in Korea and to threaten the peace in the whole Northeast Asian region. The presence of a great number of nuclear weapons on land and on the surrounding seas makes Korea a tinderbox that threatens the peace of the whole world.

We therefore call on the ecumenical family to pray for peace in our land and to urge all governments to exercise caution, to refrain from further inflaming the political atmosphere and to exercise the maximum restraint so that reason and diplomacy can prevail over narrow self-serving military, strategic or political interests. The fundamental interests of the people must prevail: mutual respect and peace with justice for all.

We also appeal to all nations to reject any attempt to cheapen life by treating Korea as a pawn in diplomatic gamesmanship, while ignoring the welfare of the people.

For nearly three decades, the NCKK and the global ecumenical fellowship have worked together to these ends. We have slowly built bridges and established regular, productive contact with the Korean Christians Federation in the North and we have shared our common prayers for peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula with the global fellowship of Christian churches through the World Council of Churches. We have sought to provide a model that governments, politicians and diplomats might follow, and we have therefore rejoiced at the successes of the two Inter-Korean summits of June 13-15, 2000 between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il and of October 2-4, 2007 between President Roh Moon-hyun and Chairman Kim Jong Il. We are convinced that they provide a good basis and framework for the two sides to work together towards a shared future.

On 15 August this year, the NCKK, the KCF and churches in other parts of the world simultaneously prayed for peace and the reunification of Korea, using in part the following words: "We pray that mistrust and confrontation between the North and the South should die down, mutual trust should be built up through reconciliation, cooperation and exchanges. The June 15 unification mood that we have all enjoyed should be revived in full blossom, and therefore the warm atmosphere of unification should blow its way through all this peninsula."

Given the current tensions, the NCKK further notes these important commitments in the


October 2007 summit peace declaration:

1. South and North Korea committed themselves to work for mutual respect and trust in order to overcome differences in ideology, and system.
2. South and North Korea committed themselves to ease military tensions, hold ministerial defense talks in November in Pyongyang to discuss this and inter-Korean economic cooperation.
3. The two sides agreed on the need to end the current armistice and establish permanent peace.
4. The two sides agreed to create a special peace zone around [Haeju](#) in North Korea and nearby areas.
5. South and North Korea committed themselves to promote humanitarian cooperation and expansion of the reunions of separated families.

The tragic events in recent days underscore the importance of pursuing this course. We urge the parties to the stalled Six-Party Talks to follow this same path, to cease exploiting the divisions and differences and to put the welfare of the people at the center of their concern. The situation must not be allowed to deteriorate further and all military actions or retaliation must be avoided we urge all our partners to pray for peace on the Korean Peninsula. We would welcome our partner councils and ecumenical organizations to support us also by urging all governments to work together to help resolve the dangerous crisis through diplomacy and peaceful means.

The World Council of Churches has repeatedly asserted that the future of the Korean Peninsula is ultimately to be determined by the Korean people. We shall fulfill this calling despite the challenges and obstacles because we believe that God is faithful and will perform mighty acts on our land. We are immensely grateful for the solidarity, prayers and support of the churches around the world. We give thanks to God for you.

Seoul, 27 November 2010



Kim Young Ju (Rev)

The Newly elected General Secretary
The National Council of Churches in Korea