

12-13 Commissioners' Resolution. Peace, Justice, and Reunification in the Korean Peninsula.

PC(USA) General Assembly 2016

Approved Recommendation

The 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) directs the PC(USA) to join its ecumenical partners, especially the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK), the Korean Christian Federation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the National Council of Christian Churches in the USA (NCCCUSA), and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in efforts to pursue peace in the Korean peninsula by doing the following:

1. Receive the "Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula," adopted by the 10th assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in South Korea in November 2013 and commend it for study and reflection.
2. Urge PC(USA) members to actively participate in the global signature campaign for a Korean Peace treaty that is being led by the NCKK and NCCCUSA with a goal of delivering 100,000 signatures of U.S. citizens to President Obama on July 27, 2016, the day that marks the 63rd anniversary of the armistice agreement.
3. Call on the president and the Congress of the United States to initiate a process for lasting peace in the Korean peninsula by working for nuclear disarmament in light of the fact that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) now has nuclear capability and the United States is intensifying militarization of the countries along the Pacific rim.
4. Request the U.S. government and the United Nations to secure a safe environment for the two Koreas to engage in dialogue and to develop a Korea-led process on healing, reconciliation, and peaceful reunification, and urge the U.S. government to make an effort to negotiate a peace settlement with North Korea.
5. Set aside June 25 (the date the Korean War broke out in 1950) through August 15 (the date when Korea was liberated from Japanese occupation in 1945) as a season of prayer and reflection in the Korean Peninsula as agreed upon on April 17–19, 2013, when delegates of the PCK met with leaders of the PC(USA) in Louisville, Kentucky.

6. Provide resources to congregations for meaningful reflection on the historical roles that the U.S. has played in relation to the Korean peninsula and to promote an increased awareness of the needs for peace, justice, and reunification in the Korean peninsula.

7. Designate and observe the Sunday before August 15 as the “Day of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula” using the common prayer and worship resources jointly prepared by the Korean Christian Federation of DPRK and the National Council of Churches in Korea, as was decided by the WCC at its 10th assembly.

Rationale

As people of Christian faith, Presbyterians in Korea and the United States have a long shared history in mission. As citizens of the world divided by nationalities, we also have a long shared history. When Korea was liberated from the Japanese occupation by the Allied Forces on August 15, 1945, Korean people overjoyed having finally gained freedom from occupation. This bliss, however, was soon shattered when the U.S.A. and the USSR, then the two allied superpowers, decided to divide the country into two along the 38th parallel under the pretext of disarming the evacuating Japanese forces. They promised to leave Korea in three months. Seventy-one years later since then, U.S.A. military forces are still in South Korea and the Korean peninsula remains one of the most militarized places in the world. The U.S.-South Korean joint military forces are engaging in massive military exercises annually that provoke retaliatory response from DPRK and North Korea has now acquired nuclear capability.

The Korean War is often called a “forgotten war” in the United States but this war cannot be forgotten by those living in the Korean peninsula. Because the war did not end with a peace treaty, but with an armistice treaty, the two countries across the dividing line are essentially still at war, and this has had most tragic consequences. Except for a few members of the Korean diaspora outside of Korea, an estimated 10,000,000 people who were separated from their families as a result of the Korean War and the following armistice treaty have never seen their family members on the other side of the military demarcation line, and that generation is almost all but gone. Furthermore, Korean peoples on both sides have been living with suspicion, hostility, and recurring incidents of violence as a result of the unresolved state of conflict and extensive militarization of the peninsula.

This armistice agreement had three signatories: U.S. Army Lieutenant General William Harrison Jr., representing the United Nations Command (UNC), North Korean General Nam Il, representing the Korean People’s Army and the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army. The agreement, in its preamble, states that the purpose of agreement is to “establish an armistice which will insure a complete cessation of

hostilities and of all acts of armed forces in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved” and in Article 4, cause 60 is stated that “In order to insure the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, the military Commanders of both sides hereby recommend to the governments of the countries concerned on both sides that within three (3) months after the Armistice Agreement is signed and becomes effective, a political conference of a higher level of both sides be held by representatives appointed respectively to settle through negotiation the question of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, etc.”

The experiences of Korean peoples prove that the armistice system is a very unstable and unsafe system that threatens peace all the time. The transition of the armistice into a peace system is the right alternative, and signing a peace treaty can pave a pathway to a peace system. A peace treaty as an international law may involve “certain political measures like normalization diplomatic relations, military measures like denuclearization, trust building and disarmament. It (could) also involve economic cooperation such as cultural, economic and social exchange” (From “Towards Sustainable Peace in the Korean Peninsula: A Korea Peace Treaty” NCKK, p 5). In essence, it will serve to “ending hostile behavior and recovering peace: that leads to reunification in the Korean peninsula.”

At the 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Busan, South Korea, in November 2013, the WCC approved the following statement:

As a global body of believers in Jesus Christ, we confess our sins in having given in to the powers and principalities of the world in their wars and military conflicts full of hate and enmity, armed with nuclear arsenals and weapons of mass destruction targeting humanity and the whole of God’s creation. Also we lament our failure to adequately acknowledge the Korean people’s long suffering, caused by external powers fighting for colonial expansion and military hegemony. We hereby join the Christians in their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, who came to this world as our Peace (Ephesians 2:13–19); who suffered, died upon the Cross, was buried, and rose again to reconcile humanity to God, to overcome divisions and conflicts, and to liberate all people and make them one (Acts 10:36–40); who, as our Messiah, will bring about a new Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21–22), With this confession, we join in firm commitment with the Christians of Korea, both North and South, especially in Korean churches’ faithful actions to work towards peace, healing, reconciliation and reunification of their people and their land. (WCC Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has historically advocated for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula. Its most recent action, taken by the 219th General Assembly (2010), approved a resolution strongly supporting “the replacement of the present armistice agreement with a just and lasting peace treaty between North and South Korea, brokered by the United Nations, and endorsed by the United States and other powers with interests in the region” (Minutes, 2010, Part I, p. 976). Furthermore, when delegates from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) met with select leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Louisville, Kentucky, on April 17–19, 2013, they issued a joint statement reaffirming

their commitment to partnership in efforts to build peace in the Korean peninsula: “We affirm our commitment to walk in humility, with open minds, prepared to change our ways fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation as we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)”

Since then, the World Council of Churches (WCC) held its 10th General Assembly in Busan, South Korea, and it was there that the above-mentioned “Statement on Peace and Reunification of Korea” was adopted. For lasting peace, it calls for a peace treaty to replace the current armistice treaty. In response to this call, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) has launched a global campaign for the signing of a peace treaty, and other ecumenical bodies, including the National Council of the Christian Churches in the USA (NCCCUSA), are actively participating in this campaign. Most recently, NCCCK sponsored a travel study workshop for a peace treaty in South Korea on May 16–23, and the Reverend Unzu Lee participated in this worship representing PC(USA). The participation of the citizens of the U.S.A. in this campaign is so vitally important considering that the U.S. was one of the three signatories of the armistice treaty, it still maintains military forces in South Korea, and the U.S. still maintains the control of South Korean troops in case of war. In addition, with the current U.S. Asia-Pacific “pivot” policy, the United States is repositioning military forces to the Pacific, increasing tension in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in Korea that is caught between China, Russia, and Japan. Given this changing context, it is critically important that we advocate with the U.S. government and international community to commence a new process of peace-building across the Korean peninsula, which includes a commitment by all parties to help materialize the Peace Treaty. It is time to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah, “[God] shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4).

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