



# Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula 한반도 평화를 위한 원탁 회담

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**Atlanta Statement** 아 트 란 타 성 명

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## CONTEXT

During this year of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korean War armistice, great progress has been made in opening a new dialogue for peace between North Korea and South Korea, as well as between North Korea and the United States of America. An explosive escalation of tensions between North Korea and the United States last year caused a dangerous crisis, threatening to precipitate another war on the Korean peninsula, which would have had catastrophic impacts on the North-East Asian region and the whole world.

In this emergency situation, we realized anew that the Cold War system of division on the Korean Peninsula is a serious threat to peace and life globally. Fortunately, during this same period, people's yearning for justice, peace, and democracy, exemplified by the Candlelight Civil Revolution, rose to political prominence in the Republic of Korea. Emerging from this revolution, President Moon Jae-in's government initiated a new dialogue with North Korea. The PyeongChang Winter Olympics served to increase the momentum. From the April 27 Panmunjom Inter-Korean summit, to the June 12 Singapore U.S. & North Korea summit, to the September 19 Pyongyang Joint Declaration, North Korea and South Korea and the U.S. have been moving toward declaring the end of the Korean War and resolving hostile relations among them, as well as denuclearization, and fostering a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

Since the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Busan in 2013, the WCC and the international ecumenical movement have renewed their 30-year long commitment to the search for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula. This has been done in accord with the WCC's 1984 Tozanso Consultation. The WCC and the international ecumenical movement have intensified their commitment to accompanying the peace efforts of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the National Council of Churches in the Republic of Korea (NCCK). They have continued their advocacy for an end to the Korean War through the replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace treaty. An important instrument for this ecumenical engagement has been and continues to be the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification, and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula (EFK). The EFK was formed in 2006 with wide participation from international church bodies, including the WCC, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), and The United Methodist Church (UMC). The EFK has the dual purposes of strengthening ecumenical participation in the efforts for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula and North-East Asia, and of promoting effective ecumenical development cooperation in North Korea.

Growing out of the respective peace efforts of the WMC, KMC, and UMC in collaboration with the WCC, the Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula was formed officially in 2016 at the World Methodist Conference in Houston, Texas, with a focus on playing a consolidating and unifying role for the global Methodist church as it promotes peace for Korea. At the second Roundtable held in Seoul, March 2017, the WMC, KMC, and UMC united around a threefold agenda: 1) to construct and promote a theology of peace and reconciliation, 2) to deepen the church role as part of the realization of a peace treaty, 3) to collaborate further with the DPRK on humanitarian projects.

The third Roundtable, held in Atlanta on November 9-11, 2018, has sought to strengthen the church's role of mediation in the matters of the normalization of DPRK-USA relations, and in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, alongside the church's longstanding call for global denuclearization. Additionally, the Roundtable has dedicated renewed attention to truthfully acknowledging harms inflicted on all sides and how to work toward present healing.

The Roundtable invited to Atlanta the top church leaders of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) from Pyongyang. However, their participation was prevented by the present U.S. travel ban.

We who have been part of the Roundtable in Atlanta wish to proclaim the God-given vision for this era and for the church as follows:

## **DECLARATIONS**

**We confess** that we, the followers of Christ, the Prince of Peace, have failed to seek Christ's peace for the divided and suffering people of the two Koreas. We have often demonized our enemies whom Christ calls us to forgive and love. We have been more sceptical than hope-filled toward peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. We have often embodied the spirit of hostility rather than the spirit of hospitality. We repent and seek God's transformative forgiveness that turns our failures into opportunities for grace and reconciliation.

**We believe** that the grace of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, traversing the boundaries of ideologies and religions, leads all the unrighteous and ungodly from the wrath of God to the restorative justice of God (Romans 1:18; 3:20-21).

Notwithstanding this year's progress toward peace on the Korean Peninsula, we are still standing on the crossroads between choosing the God of life or choosing the nuclear idol of death.

For the last 70 years, North Korea and South Korea have been separated by a hostile wall of division and have not overcome the tragedy of antagonistic symbiosis. One seems unable to exist without the other's animosity. North Korea has been cited as an imminent threat to justify an authoritarian grip on power, while North Korea cited potential U.S. aggression as a pretext for keeping its people on a war footing and for building nuclear arsenals. Yet, God who reigns in history is capable of ending the captivity of the Korean

nation. As the people of God press their hands together to pray for the Kingdom of God and its righteousness on the Korean Peninsula, God will start to “disarm the rulers and authorities” (Colossians 2:15).

**We pledge** to work for peace, indeed the peace of Christ, which makes “both groups into one” (Ephesians 2:14).

The time to enact this pledge is upon us. The system of division on the Korean Peninsula is now shaking. The stakes are high, and the moment is urgent. At the same time, the geopolitical world orders emerging during the last century, especially as then promulgated by the U.S., are taking new directions and shapes in some regions. Motivated by new ambitions, these changes are arguably affecting and even threatening peace. These changes may affect progress in North-East Asia, including in Korea.

This urgent and critical moment is an opportunity for God’s transformative redemption. Fostering replacement of the old system of division and power will enable the peace of Christ to flower on the Korean Peninsula. In this process, peace and prosperity among all will be celebrated, and we will be able to declare with awe, “A new heaven and earth appears before our eyes. The era of force is gone, and the era of morality has come” (a quote from “The March 1st Declaration of Independence in 1919”).

**We commit** ourselves to the peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula in order that we may help create a civilization of *sang-saeng* (mutual living) in and beyond South Korea and North Korea, including all North-East Asia and eventually the whole world.

The peace and reunification of North Korea and South Korea will be a sign of opening a new era of *sang-saeng* for justice, peace, and life in the four powerful nations surrounding the Korean Peninsula and among the Korean Diaspora communities in them. Under the sway of the division system, both capitalism in the South and socialism in the North have given birth to a deformed economy of *sang-geuk* (mutual extremes). In particular, the North Korean economy, which was damaged by the breakdown of the socialist bloc, has suffered an even heavier blow as a result of many economic sanctions, which have contributed to the impoverished and abused life of the North Korean people. The ongoing ‘maximum pressure’ approach in which the U.S. has taken the lead has made impossible even the most essential humanitarian aid.

**We decry** the continued, even strengthened, imposition of international sanctions against the DPRK and the American travel ban. This obstructs essential humanitarian access and goods and services, not to mention opportunities for building trust among peoples. We call on the United Nations to ease the sanctions, and the U.S. to lift the travel ban, so that humanitarian assistance can be resumed immediately.

**We support** unequivocally the Inter-Korean agreements in Panmunjom and Pyongyang between President Moon and Chairman Kim, and between Chairman Kim and President Trump in their June 2018 Summit, and call for immediate, responsible, and good faith implementation of these agreements.

**We honor and affirm** the agreements and efforts to end the tension and hostility of the Korean War and to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in keeping with our global call for denuclearization. We urge the U.S. and the international community to respect the self-determination of the two Koreas, including allowing a step-by-step approach to achieve denuclearization. As an essential first step toward achieving total peace on the Korean Peninsula, we encourage an immediate and official end of the Korean War.

In working toward peace, we reaffirm the five principles for ensuring a successful process which were adopted and proclaimed in the historic “1988 Declaration” of the Korean churches for national unification of the Korean people and peace on the Korean Peninsula: Independence, Peace, Grand National Unity, Humanitarianism, and People’s Participation. These principles, collectively held in mind at each step, have long proved effective in helping to advance dialogue between North and South. We believe they remain necessary.

#### **CALLS TO ACTION**

1. **We call** all Methodist and Ecumenical partners to pray and work for the formal end of the Korean War and to replace the Korean War Armistice Agreement with a Peace Treaty, and we urge the international community to expedite negotiations for such a Peace Treaty.
2. **We call** all Methodist and Ecumenical partners to embark on prayerful advocacy for the lifting of international sanctions through letter writing and petition efforts.
3. **We call** on U.S.-based partners to embark on prayerful advocacy for the lifting of the U.S. travel ban through letter writing and other petition efforts.
4. **We call** on U.S.-based partners to set a goal of contacting all senators and representatives to advocate for the calls above, before the next anniversary of the Korean War, which began on June 25.
5. **We call** all Methodist and Ecumenical partners to join the World Council of Churches in observing each year the Sunday closest to August 15, the day of Korean Liberation, as a day of prayer for peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.
6. **We call** on all Methodist and Ecumenical partners to engage in relationship-building efforts with the people of both North Korea and South Korea.

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As we, participants in the Roundtable, work toward peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula, we pray for God-given visions and dreams! By the grace of the living God, we are witnessing a miraculous event unfolding, raising hopes that the people of God will return from their Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem on the Korean Peninsula. “Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations” (Isaiah 61:10).

When the old era of *sang-geuk* is over and the new era of *sang-saeng* begins on the Korean Peninsula, we will see the body joined as God has envisioned: “God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body” (I Corinthians 12:24-25). Like a trans-continental highway, the body, being so joined, will stretch from Busan and will pass through North Korea, Siberia, Central Asia, and Russia and will finally arrive in Europe. The long trail of sighs and tears will turn into a trail of joy and hope. To build up the Highway of God (Isaiah 35:8) is the mission of the church. Arise and shine! The glory of the Lord rises upon you. Raise a banner of the peace of Christ for the nations!



