

## An appeal for peace in Korea

July 27, 2023, marks 70 years since the signing of the armistice agreement that paused open conflict in the Korean War in 1953. The signatories to that armistice, North Korea, the U.S. and China, had agreed to reconvene to establish a peace treaty to finally end the state of war itself within months; however, that has not yet come to pass. This armistice system solidifies the division of the Korean Peninsula into two separate nations. The state of war also continues to have a profound effect on society throughout the Korean Peninsula such as conflict and division within South Korean society. One particular implication of this ongoing state of war is that [wartime command authority \(OPCON\)](#)<sup>1</sup> over the South Korean military still lies with the U.S. military and not the South Korean government. This means that even though the South Korean administration under President Moon Jae-in wanted to sign [an end-of-war agreement](#)<sup>2</sup> with North Korea, the [U.S. refused](#)<sup>3</sup> to accept it, and the state of war continued. [One [former member of the South Korean administration](#)<sup>4</sup> also laments the U.S. refusal to accept North Korea's proposal for a gradual step of trust-building at the Hanoi Summit. The state of war continues.]

As a PC(USA) mission co-worker assigned to the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK), one of my primary responsibilities has been to support the NCCK's participation in the coalition driving the [Korea Peace Appeal campaign \(KPA\)](#)<sup>5</sup>. The KPA campaign appeals to the governments with authority on the Korean Peninsula, including the U.S., South Korea and North Korea, to end the hostile policies that perpetuate the state of war, and engage instead in authentic dialogue promoting gradual steps of mutual trust-building. My work with the NCCK focuses on interpreting the KPA campaign to international ecumenical partners such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) as well as the PC(USA). Together, our coalition gathers signatures supporting the KPA that we will deliver to the United Nations this fall. [The NCCK also works on educating its partners on the nature of this forever war and its effects on the population of the peninsula, including violations of human rights in both South Korea and North Korea as well as the de-prioritization of genuine human security for the sake of promoting a military security held in place by mutual dehumanization, threats and sanctions.]

Our partners in the NCCK wonder if the state of war might have ended sooner if South Korea had command authority over its own military. Sometimes my role as a mission co-worker has me interpret the work of our partners back to our churches in the PC(USA). Sometimes my role involves teaching partners around the world what the NCCK thinks of the ongoing conflict.

---

<sup>1</sup> No More Delays: Why It's Time to Move Forward With Wartime OPCON Transition: <https://www.stimson.org/2022/no-more-delays-why-its-time-to-move-forward-with-wartime-opcon-transition/>

<sup>2</sup> South Korea's Moon optimistic about end to Korean War: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45832777>

<sup>3</sup> South Korean leader repeats call for declaration to end Korean War: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korean-leader-repeats-call-declaration-end-korean-war-2021-09-21/>

<sup>4</sup> [Interview] US should have accepted NK's offer to shutter Yongbyon, says former SK vice foreign minister: [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/1099204.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1099204.html)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/korea-peace-appeal/>

Sometimes it means I cry in frustration alongside our partners and pledge to find more creative ways to convince the U.S. to stop hindering Korean efforts to end the Korean War through mutual trust-building.

If you wish to join us in this work, please visit the [PC\(USA\)'s page for the KPA](#), add your name to the appeal noting your affiliation to the PC(USA), and read through the resources provided that describe the complicated nature of the ongoing conflict.

Kurt Esslinger  
Mission Co-worker  
South Korea  
July 21, 2023

*To learn more about Kurt Esslinger's and Hyeyoung Lee's ministries and to subscribe to their letters, visit their [mission connections page](#).*