

## On Acknowledging and Reconciling for Killing Korean Civilians in July 1950

In response to Item 12-01, that the 222nd General Assembly (2016) approve the following alternate resolution:

### The 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

1. Acknowledges that during the Korean War, American troops knowingly killed at least 150 Korean civilians (and probably between 250 and 300, mostly women and children) on July 26–29, 1950, near the village of No Gun Ri.
2. Directs the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate with the President of the United States and members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, to request an official statement to the Republic of Korea that would include:
  - a. an acknowledgement of the responsibility of the United States military for knowingly killing Korean civilians at No Gun Ri;
  - b. an apology and statement of regret for the actions of United States troops at No Gun Ri, with an indication of openness to consider appropriate compensation to the surviving victims and the families of those killed or wounded in that incident; and
  - c. a commitment to include information about the events at No Gun Ri in the training of United States military personnel to diminish the likelihood of such events happening in the future.
3. Directs staff persons from the Presbyterian Mission Agency to consult electronically with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s mission partners in the Republic of Korea, including the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), in order to:
  - a. offer condolences to the approximately forty surviving victims of the events of No Gun Ri on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
  - b. create a bibliography of resources about the events at No Gun Ri;
  - c. create worship materials to remember the people impacted by the events at No Gun Ri;

- d. share the bibliography and worship materials and this overture and rationale electronically with the congregations and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK);
- e. explore possibilities for joint prayer and witness regarding continuing tensions on the Korean peninsula, in the South China Sea, and other considerations for peace, world order, security, and meeting basic human needs that are currently before their congregations and members.

Language of earlier Overture 12-01 that was not approved in lieu of the alternate overture above:

The Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse respectfully overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. Acknowledge that American troops knowingly killed at least 150 Korean civilians (and probably between 250 and 300, mostly women and children) on July 26–29, 1950, near the village of No Gun Ri, and offer apology and condolences to the approximately forty surviving victims.
2. Instruct the Stated Clerk to communicate to the president of the United States and to members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, requesting them to acknowledge the responsibility of the United States military for the deaths of those Korean civilians, to officially apologize for the actions of United States troops at No Gun Ri, and to provide appropriate compensation to the surviving victims and to the families of those killed or wounded in the No Gun Ri incident.
3. Instruct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to arrange a meeting between United States soldiers who were present at No Gun Ri and Korean survivors of the incident there, for the purpose of resolving the long pent-up resentments and feelings of guilt, and moving toward true forgiveness and reconciliation.
4. Recommend to John Knox Press/Geneva Press that they publish an English translation of the true-story novel, *Do You Know Our Pain?*, written by the late Eun-yong Chung, whose two infant children were killed at No Gun Ri and whose wife was severely wounded there.
5. Establish a task force within the Presbyterian Mission Agency consisting of at least two staff persons from the World Mission Office and two staff persons from the Office of Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry charged to research the events at No Gun Ri and coordinate the response of the PC(USA) as outlined in this overture.

6. Transmit this overture and rationale, containing information about the events in Korea in 1950, to the churches and presbyteries of the PC(USA) and recommend study of materials including Do You Know Our Pain? and the book The Bridge at No Gun Ri by Charles J. Hanley, Sang-hun Choe, and Martha Mendoza, AP journalists whose reporting of the incident won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative journalism in 2000.
7. Instruct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to consult with the PC(USA)'s mission partners in South Korea, including the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), about the feasibility of jointly commissioning and funding the construction of a memorial church on the grounds of or near the No Gun Ri Peace Park in South Korea.

## **Rationale**

On June 25, 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea in force, overwhelming the South Korean defenders. As the North Koreans surged south, the United States sent occupation troops from Japan to try to slow or halt their advance. North Korean pressure was too strong, and as American and South Korean soldiers retreated south, thousands of civilian refugees trekked south to escape the fighting.

By July 23, 1950, five hundred to six hundred refugees were hiding in the mountains near the village of Im Ke Ri, behind American lines a little more than 100 miles from the 38th parallel. In the evening of July 25, American troops entered the village of Im Ke Ri and forcibly moved the refugees, saying they would lead them into a safe zone. Walking with what belongings they could carry, they spent the next night in the open near a river.

Early in the morning of July 26, the American soldiers who had guarded the refugees at night retreated to the south, leaving the refugees alone. The refugees moved along a highway, looking for freedom and safety, toward the south where American troops had positioned their defense line. Around noon the column of refugees was stopped by American soldiers, who ordered them to go up on an elevated railroad and searched their bags and bodies. No weapons were found. As they continued along the railroad, a U.S. reconnaissance plane circled over the heads of the refugees, and not long after, American planes dropped bombs and strafed the refugees resting on the railroad. More than one hundred were killed.

Seeking safety, the surviving refugees hid inside the No Gun Ri twin tunnels under the elevated railroad. For three nights and four days, soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, U.S. First Cavalry Division, who had dug in on the hills at both ends of the tunnel, fired into the tunnels with rifles and machine guns. Many

of the men and older boys escaped under cover of darkness, believing that the Americans would not fire on women and children. By the time the Americans retreated further south, more than one hundred civilians lay dead in the tunnels, three quarters of them women, children, or elderly. An official Korean investigation fifty years later identified 150 individuals who had been killed in the tunnels, 13 missing, and 55 wounded, some of whom later died of their wounds. The true number killed is likely much higher, probably 250 to 300 or more.

After the Korean War ended with the armistice in mid 1953, compensation was offered to civilians who had suffered losses from the actions of South Korean and American forces. Survivors of No Gun Ri applied for compensation, but were told that their application was too late and that there was no evidence that anything had occurred at No Gun Ri. The repressive government in power in South Korea at that time deterred the survivors from pressing their claim further.

Eun-yong Chung, a lawyer whose two infant children had been killed at No Gun Ri, and his wife seriously wounded, began to document the event, collecting newspaper reports, searching libraries, and reviewing official records from that time. Beginning in 1960, he sent petition letters to the U.S. government, Senate, and House of Representatives about twenty times, asking for an investigation of the attack, official apology, and compensation. The U.S. Army at first denied that the 7th Cavalry Regiment had been positioned at No Gun Ri. When Mr. Chung produced military documents showing that they were there, the Army insisted that there was no evidence of their involvement in the incident. For decades, Mr. Chung was turned away, but he continued to gather documentary evidence and to interview other survivors. He formed an Association for Bereaved Families of No Gun Ri Victims.

While Korea was ruled by a series of military governments, it was dangerous to make claims about atrocities committed during the Korean War. Mr. Chung turned to historical fiction, the only way to publish safely about wartime events that were less than heroic and honorable. His first novel was published in 1977. In 1994, after doing additional research, he published a full-length novel on the No Gun Ri Incident, *Do You Know Our Pain?* After this, his son, Dr. Koo-do Chung, researched No Gun Ri-related documents in the U.S. National Archives and published papers on the No Gun Ri Incident in terms of history and international law. He discovered many documents that confirmed events and commands that impinged on the No Gun Ri Incident, but the operational log of the 7th Cavalry Regiment for July 1950 was unaccountably missing from the archives.

In 1998, a Korean reporter for the Associated Press heard of Mr. Chung's work and became interested in the difficult struggles of the victims of No Gun Ri. He and two AP colleagues spent a year reviewing the documentation, interviewing victims, and locating surviving American soldiers who had been at No Gun Ri that July. They published an in-depth investigative article reporting "the truth of the No Gun Ri Incident" in late September 1999. Because of this publication, the No Gun Ri Incident was widely known all over the world, and public indignation boiled over in South Korea and overseas. The journalists of the AP who investigated and reported the No Gun Ri Incident received the Pulitzer Prize for investigative journalism in 2000, and ten more prizes later.

Both the Korean and U.S. governments began an official investigation on the No Gun Ri Incident in October 1999. At last, in January 2001, the U.S. government acknowledged the existence of the No Gun Ri Incident, which they had denied all along. Then President Clinton issued a statement expressing “deep regret.” But in spite of evidence to the contrary, the U.S. investigation claimed that no orders were given to shoot civilian refugees, so their deaths were just unfortunate collateral damage during the conduct of war. Neither apology, nor compensation to the victims, has ever been offered.

The investigation by Korean officials came to different conclusions following the revelation that there were several significant documents in the U.S. Archives that had been reviewed by the American government investigators but not included in their official report. Among many such unreported documents was a communication from the U.S. ambassador to South Korea at that time advising the State Department in Washington that the U.S. Army had established a policy of firing on approaching refugee groups, out of fear they might harbor enemy infiltrators. Despite repeated calls for the U. S. to re-open its investigation, no action has been taken. The Korean government declined to press the issue, for fear of damaging U.S.-Korea relations.

On February 9, 2004, the South Korean National Assembly adopted a Special Act on the Review and Restoration of Honor for the No Gun Ri Victims. Among its provisions was the establishment of the No Gun Ri Peace Park at the site of the tunnels as a memorial, museum, and peace education center. Dr. Koo-Do Chung, son of the long-time researcher, is the current director of the Peace Park.

In 2014, an adult delegation and a youth delegation commissioned by the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse as part of its mission partnership with Pyongyang Presbytery in South Korea visited the No Gun Ri Peace Park and learned about the terrible events there in July 1950. Moved by their experience there and committed to promoting peace and preventing future human rights violations, they proposed this overture for the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse to present to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Misconduct like this by American troops that results in avoidable injury and death of civilians casts a dark shadow of resentment and distrust of American intentions and actions, in spite of proclamation that the United States is militarily involved in other countries to protect the welfare and freedom of the people there. If the tragic events at No Gun Ri had come to the attention of U. S. authorities and been taken seriously at the time, or even within a few years after the armistice ending the Korean War, changes in military doctrine and training could have been put in place that would have prevented similar massacres that took place later, in Vietnam and elsewhere.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States extended humanitarian relief and recovery assistance to peoples whose lives had been disrupted by the war in both allied countries and enemy nations, earning a reputation for promoting peace and championing human rights. Irresponsible acts of violence against civilians, like the one at No Gun Ri and others that followed, belie that reputation and suggest instead that the United States engages in terrorist tactics. As this reputation has grown, it has spawned resentment and hatred of Americans and has fostered terrorist actions against the United

States and its citizens. Taking responsibility for the massacre at No Gun Ri and offering restitution to its victims and their families will be a significant step toward restoring the good reputation of our country.

The rate of suicides among U.S. soldiers returning from combat in the Korean War was considerably higher than in World War II. When soldiers find themselves killing civilians, either inadvertently or under orders, as at No Gun Ri, they are apparently more likely to suffer from PTSD, experiencing long-lingering feelings of guilt and shame that drive many to suicide. Had military doctrine and training been changed in the aftermath of the No Gun Ri incident to reduce civilian deaths, it is likely that a considerable amount of the suffering experienced by veterans of later conflicts could have been avoided.

Among the Korean survivors and others acquainted with the terrible event at No Gun Ri, the experience of unmerited injury and unrequited suffering has created what Koreans call han, a condition of hopeless resentment and depression that is very injurious to their quality of life. Even at this late date, an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, sincere apology, and appropriate compensation (what theologians call “repentance”) can provide welcome relief to those people whose lives were shattered by what Americans did at No Gun Ri.

This overture offers an opportunity for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to unveil the violence that the United States has often inflicted on the population of our ostensible allies, to open the way for changes in the conduct of U.S. military operations in the future, and to undertake steps toward reconciliation between American veterans and civilian casualties in South Korea.

### **Financial Implication**

Presbyterian Mission Agency - \$14,932 (2017) \$0 (2018) – Revised

Source: <https://www.pc-biz.org/search/6297>