

Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea
Statement on the Korea Peace Process
November 2018

The news on September 20, 2018, about the results of the summit meeting between South Korean President Moon Jae In and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong Un, came as a welcome step forward on the precarious path toward peace in the Korean peninsula. We in the Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea welcome this development with joy and hope. The symbolism of the leaders of the two Koreas that have been at war for 68 years, standing side by side, heralds a time of peace and reconciliation.

The prophets Micah and Isaiah foresaw the day when God will draw all nations together and “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” This vision seems as far away today as it was in ancient Israel, but it remains the hope of many hearts, especially in the Korean peninsula. People there long for the day when “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” This divine promise is our goal, the destination toward which our ministry of peace is aimed.

While we in the United States have generally forgotten the Korean War, that war has been an ever-present reality for over 65 years, as the people of the Korean peninsula have lived with the death and destruction rained on the two Koreas by seen or unseen military actions. The continuing economic and political war that the United States has waged against North Korea has caused great harm to the people in the Korean peninsula. Living in this continuous state of war, it is understandable that both Korean governments would maintain large armies and prioritize resources to support the military rather than supply civilian needs.

If denuclearization of the Korea peninsula is to become a reality, the U.S. must offer concrete steps to reduce its threatening posture and to move toward a formal end to the Korean War. Indeed, in the agreed-upon statement from the Singapore summit last June, “President Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK, and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

Contrary to recent reports in the U.S. media, North Korea has taken steps toward fulfilling its commitments in Singapore. It had already suspended its nuclear and missile tests for the last ten months. In addition to the nuclear test site it dynamited in May, North Korea has since destroyed a missile engine test site.

North Korea will never meet the U.S. denuclearization demands while it faces strict economic sanctions. Chairman Kim is waiting for the U.S. to lift some of the sanctions before negotiations on further denuclearization can continue. The process toward peace must be reciprocal rather than the United States insisting upon having authority over North Korea.

In this third summit meeting with President Moon, Chairman Kim promised to dismantle its missile sites and to work towards a peace treaty that will end a 68-year war that has haunted the world and kept the Korean Peninsula in a precarious state of military tension. He further indicated his “willingness to continue to take additional measures, such as the permanent dismantlement of the nuclear facilities in Yeongbyeon, as the United States takes

corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement.”

This is an auspicious opening that could lead to a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. We urge our President to continue negotiations toward a new relationship between the U.S. and North Korea and to undertake a reciprocal, step-by-step approach to replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with a formal Peace Treaty to end the war. The Armistice halted open hostilities in the 1950-53 phase of the Korean War, but the lack of a Peace Treaty has aggravated hostilities for the past 65 years, leading to military build-ups by both North and South and distortion of the news by each side for its own purposes.

Over the past four decades, new historical understandings of the Korean War and its aftermath have emerged, especially among younger generations in South Korea. The Korean people have never stopped hoping to have one unified country again, instead of two separated Koreas. The forced separation of family members on opposite sides of the DMZ has caused grief and suffering long enough. The Armistice Agreement made no provision for reuniting families before there is a Peace Treaty. The number of Koreans who were separated from family members by the Korean War is dwindling, with no opportunity for them to see their relatives again.

Eighty million people on the Korean Peninsula, millions more in the diaspora, and peace-loving people around the world wish to see peace and reconciliation. After the U.S./North Korea Summit in June, polls showed that more than 70% of South Koreans want peace and reconciliation with the North and over 54% of American voters applauded the results of the Summit.

An official declaration by the United States and North Korea that the Korean War is over would be a significant step toward negotiating and ratifying a Peace Treaty, as was promised in the 1953 Armistice Agreement. It would help build trust between the two countries and open the way for more serious discussion toward a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

The economic war the United States has waged against North Korea is another major stumbling block on the path toward peace. The hope that economic sanctions would break the resolve of the North Korean regime has proven illusory. Early in 2018, a UNICEF study reported that 60,000 North Korean children were at risk of starvation because of stricter sanctions imposed by the U.S. Even that prospect has not brought a break-through in negotiations with North Korea. We Christians believe that humanitarian aid is a moral imperative. American Christians and others have routinely sent such aid, and it should be exempted from those sanctions. Relaxing or even removing the sanctions against North Korea is one of the most powerful “corresponding measures” our government could take to show our commitment to a peaceful world order and encourage North Korea to forgo its reliance on nuclear weapons for its security.

President Trump took a major, courageous step in opening diplomacy with North Korea by meeting with Chairman Kim in Singapore in June. The progress that was made in the first half of 2018 toward peace in Korea is evidence that diplomacy rather than threats and sanctions is a more promising approach to settling differences among nations. A second

summit meeting between the United States and North Korea would hold promise for re-starting the progress toward peace that has stalled since then.

As followers of the Prince of Peace, we members of the Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea encourage Presbyterians and other people of faith and good will to raise their voices to urge our government to take concrete steps to bring the Korean War to an end and to provide the political, economic and military assurances of North Korea's security, so that there can be peace in a reconciled, nuclear-free Korean peninsula.