

Interview of Il-Shik Hong, Sunhak Peace Prize Council Chairman

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Tongil Group, Steve Sakuwa: An interview with Mr. Il-Shik Hong, Sunhak Peace Prize Council Chairman By Monthly JoongAng Korean National Major Monthly Magazine, which was published on October 2014 issue

Investing in a transparent and fair selection process...Doing his best to popularize the values of peace

Sunhak Peace Prize Committee Chairman Il-Shik Hong is a leading scholar in the field of Korean Studies who served as the President of Korea University. He was also a professor of Korean literature at the same university, and taught students for many years. He was an advocate of the “cultural territory theory,” which argues that the fate of a nation lies in the depth and breadth of its culture. He is still active today, serving as the director of the Korean Liberal Arts Society Research Institute as well as the chairman of the World Filial Culture Department. We interviewed with him in the chairman’s office within the Sunhak Peace Prize Council executive offices in Mapo-gu, Seoul.

Having been selected as the Chairman of the Sunhak Peace Prize Council poses a tremendous responsibility.

“It is indeed a heavy responsibility. I can barely sleep any more. (Laughs) If we want this to become a prize that has world-class authority, we have to utilize a very transparent and fair winner selection process, because this will be a world-scale prize established in Korea. I want the award ceremony of the Sunhak Peace Prize to become a festival with joyful attendance by the entire world as one family, just as Rev. and Dr. Moon envisioned. I want to work hard, together with the other council members, to make this vision come true.”

Could you please explain the Sunhak Peace Prize in simple terms?

“The Sunhak Peace Prize bears a combination of Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon’s names signifying the Peace Prize. The committee will select an individual or organization that has contributed significantly toward world peace or the good of humankind. The prize was established to honor such people and organizations before the world, and to expand the culture of peace throughout the globe.”

Could you tell us something about the background behind the establishment of the Sunhak Peace Prize?

“The prize was created to carry out the desire of the late Rev. Moon, who said that he ‘wanted to give a prize of peace to those who realized true love in their lives and worked to create a peaceful world.’ In February 2013, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon officially proposed the creation of the prize. This year, on August 11th, the Sunhak Peace Prize Council was officially formed, comprised of leaders from around the world who had resonated with Rev. and Dr.

Moon's peace movements.”

What sort of people make up the Sunhak Peace Prize Council?

“About 10 members were inducted into the council, representing different fields from around the world. We have representatives from political, social, press, educational, NGO, academic and religious fields. We plan to expand the committee with well-known officials from around the world.”

What sets the Sunhak Peace Prize apart from other peace prizes, both in Korea and abroad?

“What sets our prize apart is the fact that it is steeped in the philosophies and life work of the founders of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. The founding principle of the Family Federation is the idea that man was created to live for the sake of others. Rev. and Dr. Moon toured the world, working hard to create a peaceful world that transcends national borders, race and religion, centering upon the clear vision of ‘One Family under God.’ As a prize established by the only divided country in the world, Korea, the Sunhak Peace Prize will convey the hopes and wishes for a peaceful world that begins with peace in the Korean Peninsula. We will work hard to ensure that efforts for peace do not end with the recipients of the award, but that their successors and heirs are properly supported and their efforts recognized, popularizing the values of peace.”

Hoping for Rev. Moon to be seen in a New Light through the Peace Prize

What sort of effort is needed in order to bring the Sunhak Peace Prize to the same level as the Nobel Prize?

“In order to bring the prize to the world stage, we must first and foremost be unbiased. We must be totally transparent in our candidate selection process, so that the world can have confidence in us. The prize must also contribute toward the development of society and a peaceful world.”

How are you planning to guarantee the unbiased selection of candidates?

“In order to guarantee the fairness of the prize, it is crucial that we have leaders of high moral standing from around the world participating in the selection process. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali and Washington Times CEO Larry Beasley are some of the international leaders serving on the council. Representing our own nation of Korea, we have Jogye Order Bulguksa Temple Priest Jooji Seongta, Korean Council on Foreign Relations President Tae-Ik Jeong and others.

The council is made up of leaders who all hail from different fields and different walks of life. I believe that this will ensure integrity and fairness in the selection process.”

How did Chairman Hong form ties with the Family Federation? (Mr. Il-Shik Hong explained his unique relationship with Rev. Moon)

“I first met him in December of 1980. I believe that it was fate. At the time, I was compiling an unabridged Chinese dictionary, and I was unable to get any support for its publication: not from the government, not from businesses, nor from universities, because China at the time was a hostile state. At that time, Rev. Moon came forward and helped me, a complete and total stranger to him. He said that he felt that our fate as a nation was directly connected to our relationship to China, and that a Chinese dictionary would become a cornerstone in exchange between our countries. He then went on to give me two hundred million won, which was a lot of money at the time.”

Chairman Hong kept up continuous correspondence with Rev. Moon after that, supporting his ideals and world views, and even visiting him in Danbury Prison. “Rev. Moon has, centering upon his founding philosophy that man was created for the sake of others, taken the philosophies and teachings of the world's religions, including modern Christianity, and adapted them to his own teachings, creating a unified, universal philosophy. He is the first Korean person to spread Korean culture and philosophy to the rest of the world. Rev. Moon is the first Korean to be this well-known and respected by the world since Dangun,” said Chairman Hong.

As he reflected on his memories of Rev. Moon, he repeated the words “respect” and “global citizen” many times. He may not be very young, but his memory is sharp and his answers were logical. Continuing his praise of Rev. Moon, he said that the Korean idioms, “You don't recognize Confucius, even if he were your neighbor” and “Heroes are not recognized in their hometowns,” perfectly described him. “It is only within Korea that Rev. Moon remains unrecognized. I hope that the Sunhak Peace Prize can serve as the impetus that causes Korean citizens to see him in a new light,” said the Chairman.