

## Women's Leadership in Reconciliation and Peacemaking - A Unified Korea

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It has been over 70 years since the Korean war broke out, resulting in the separation of one country and way of life into two. Even after these many years, the lands bordering the demilitarized zone remain the most heavily armed in the world. While attempts for lasting resolution and reconciliation appear entirely out of reach, Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) Co-founders, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon have held out hope. Using unique, outside-the-box ideas, they are determined to peacefully bring together their homeland, as a means to igniting the realistic possibility for peace throughout the world.

To contribute to these peacebuilding efforts, WFWP in Korea, Japan, and the United States facilitated an international Global Women's Peace Network (GWPN) forum in collaboration with Universal Peace Federation, on the theme, "Women's Leadership in Reconciliation and Peacemaking- A Unified Korea: Finding Seeds of Hope." Each of the four speakers of North Korean descent shared their personal accounts, and distinct impressions on ways the international community can support the peace efforts. The program took place on August 17, 2021, and drew in the participation of 700 people from 42 countries around the world.

The forum moderator, Mrs. Moriko Hori, President of WFWP Japan, convened the program by calling attention to the underlying theme, asserting the important role women and mothers play in any unification process. Mrs. Hori encouraged those living in South Korea, Japan, and America to take this valuable opportunity to learn more about the realities of North Korea. Setting the tone for the program, she shares, "The first step to reconciliation begins with mutual understanding... I hope this will be a breakthrough opportunity to break your stereotypes and promote mutual understanding."

WFWP International President, Mrs. Julia H. Moon, welcomed the distinguished speakers and worldwide audience to the noteworthy program. Providing a wider context for the WFWP Co-founder's desire for a reunified Korea, Mrs. Moon shared about their first-hand experience in a divided homeland, the belief that this ideological division reflects a divided human race, and their heart to bring about the harmony, goodness, and peace our Creator seeks for everyone. In order to overcome the deep walls of distrust on the Korean Peninsula, diplomacy beyond the efforts of official government entities is needed. Mrs. Moon explained, "It will take a great deal of open communication, education and sharing to understand the people of North Korea, their attitudes, culture, and their needs... This, I believe, is where women are needed and can be most effective in the process of reconciliation and building a culture of peace."

Giving introductory remarks, Mrs. Angelika Selle, President of WFWP USA, described the founding vision of the GWPN, which is to build a lasting world of peace under God by leveraging the maternal perspective of women. She also shed light on the topic and selection of speakers, all of whom were of North Korean descent and currently living in South Korea, Japan, or the United States. These speakers were deliberately chosen to provide personal insights and perspectives on life in North Korea, and practical suggestions as to what can be done to accelerate the process of unification. Mrs. Selle concluded her remarks by encouraging women leaders to get involved and seek solutions. "It is indeed women, and in particular mothers, who naturally carry these characteristics of compassion, love, service and sacrifice within us, which helps us open doors when there are walls in front of us."

The first panelist, Professor Min Gyu Kim, graduate of Kim Il Sung University and Professor at Woosuk University, Department of Defense, gave an eye-opening speech based on his time in North Korea. Professor Kim revealed misinformation and numerous misconceptions, such as false claims of poor-

performing athletes being sent to coal mines. "The media and North Korean defectors have communicated a distorted reality sometimes, which is of no help. One needs to recognize the different values and identities of North Koreans, and not be quick to distort or criticize it." One such religious identity for North Koreans taught at a young age, is viewing their nation's leadership as God. He confirmed that making the effort to understand the North Korean way of life, and building a relationship of trust will be a step towards unification.



A uniquely refreshing perspective on unification was presented by a third-generation North Korean-Japanese woman, Ms. Hee Ryang Cheon, who described her experience as a student of the traditional Korean "Chosun" schools in Japan. Ms. Cheon explained the meaning of the word Chosun as "Undivided Korea," and at these schools, students view themselves as proud descendants of unified Korea. Describing the history of conflict between the Koreas and Japan, Ms. Cheon affirmed, "The only place in the world where all three countries meet is at a Chosun School. The students of Chosun schools do not want the three countries to fight and be divided, but desperately want peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. It is a peace ambassador training school to lead the Korean Peninsula to peace..." The unique model of Chosun schools alluded to a huge response from the audience, who were eager to know more about the traditions of the schools.

Yet another heart-opening story was given by Mrs. Son Ja Han, head of the North Korea Human Rights International Association. Born in North Korea but having grown up in China, Mrs. Han narrated her experience of visiting her family in North Korea for the first time after 40 years. During her visit, she found rampant hunger, poverty, and illness. Her experiences motivated her to help defectors escape to safe countries, and she eventually assisted over 70 people to do so. A rush of emotions was experienced by everyone present in the program, when Mrs. Han recounted her experience of rescuing a six-year-old girl Hanmi Kim, before being sold for the family's survival. In her conclusion, Mrs. Han tearfully pleaded, "Even now, there are many hidden North Korean defectors in China who are having a hard time. We would be grateful if you could take this opportunity today to know a little bit about this situation and show interest."

Finally, an influential aspect of the program was presented by Ms. Rosa Park, Director of Programs and Editor at the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), a third-generation North Korean living in the US. Ms. Park described the sacrifices and chain of events that led to her family immigrating to the US, and her gratitude for being able to live in the free world where she has access to resources like medical care. As such, she proclaimed, "It is my responsibility to be a voice for those who are voiceless in North Korea. It is not just my responsibility though. Everyone in the free world has a responsibility to stand up for those suffering in North Korea." As a human rights advocate, Ms. Park described the numerous human rights violations defectors are subjected to, many of which disproportionately impact women. Finally, she shared that in order to prepare for unification, contributors from every industry, such as teachers, engineers, and medical professionals, will be essential for a smooth transition. She urged each person to think about the role they would like to play in the reunified Korea.

All the presentations were extremely rich and deep. The stories and depictions ignited many questions from the audience, some of which were answered during the program.

Mrs. Margie Moon, President for the Korea subregion 2 of WFWP gave the concluding statement, highlighting the story and impact of each of the presenters.

As an action step for the participating audience, Mrs. Kiyomi Schmidt, Outreach Director of WFWP USA, introduced the 1% Love Share Project.

To conclude together with an uplifting cultural performance, a mesmerizing video of a Korean dance group, the 'Little Angels,' was played. The heartwarming performance took place during the group's first visit to Pyongyang in May, 1998, to meet their counterparts.