

ILC2021 Europe and the Middle East: International Media Association for Peace

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Europe and the Middle East -- The media's peacemaking potential in Northeast Asia was the theme of a webinar held by the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), one of the UPF associations.

The online conference on "The Role of the Media in Contributing to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," held on April 30, 2021, was one of the sessions of the 2021 International Leadership Conference.

Speakers:

Thomas McDevitt, chairman, *The Washington Times*, United States
Masahiro Kuroki, president and CEO, *Sekai Nippo*, Japan
Professor Toshio Miyatsuka, president, Miyatsuka Korea Institute, Japan
Lutfi Dervishi, a journalist and political analyst, Albania
Humphrey Hawksley, author, commentator, and broadcaster; longstanding BBC foreign correspondent, United Kingdom.



Peter Zoehrer, the IMAP coordinator for Europe and the Middle East, welcomed the participants and explained the background of the webinar.

Although to some people, he said, peace on the Korean Peninsula might appear like a dream, UPF is seriously committed to this seemingly insurmountable task and already has held nearly 100 webinars on this theme to overwhelmingly positive response. He affirmed that the role of the media in this process is imperative.



The moderator of the session was **Rita Payne**, the former Asia editor for BBC World News and current president emeritus of the Commonwealth Journalists Association.

In her welcoming remarks Ms. Payne pointed out the declining trust in the media with regard to the "fake news" phenomenon, which constantly undermines traditional media ethics. She emphasized that this role is equally vital in times of war and peace, and with clear motivations, the media can be a crucial part of "the network of democratic institutions that have helped maintain peace in Europe."

Ms. Payne explained that the conference aims to create a coherent and multi-dimensional picture of the role of media in reunification efforts on the Korean Peninsula by drawing on the Western experience of peaceful German reunification, while also examining the Balkan region and former Soviet countries.

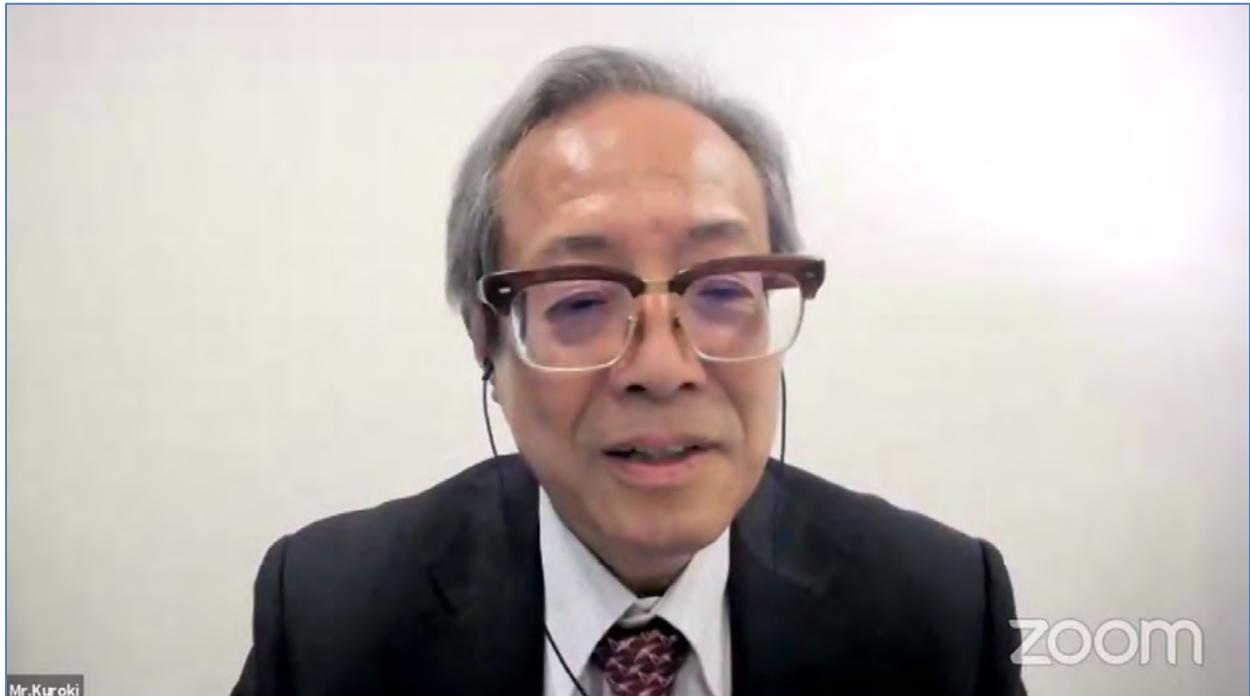


Thomas McDevitt, the chairman of the US newspaper *The Washington Times*, who also serves as the chairman of UPF-USA, emphasized the possibility lying within the conflicted Korean Peninsula. It is currently in a state that can serve as a key to open a great new era of peace and prosperity, or can plunge the world into a very dark and dangerous future. He drew attention to the current disruptions in the world -- the questioning of social norms, the shift in the Atlantic-centered civilization, the global COVID-19 pandemic -- and highlighted the importance of how people understand these challenges. "As journalists, it is vital to seek what is most essential in order to report the news with accuracy, fairness and relevance," he said.

He pointed out the role of IMAP in this, as the organization's main purpose is to encourage the development of a responsible global media industry that is highly trusted, independent and prosperous, while also being accessible to all people.

Mr. McDevitt stated that the 2020 IMAP Resolution can serve as a powerful tool for promoting a self-governing, moral media with high standards in reporting and editing; supporting and recognizing excellence in journalism; and using their international network for the sake of peace.

Asked if the German experiences of unification could be applied in the situation of Korean unification, Mr. McDevitt said that China holds the key, being the main superpower opposing unification in the region. He explained that unification will be possible in time, as the human rights violations and the obstruction of free speech in both China and in North Korea are contrary to human nature and basic human values. Thus the parallel Mr. McDevitt drew with German unification is that a common people with a common DNA cannot be separated for eternity.



Masahiro Kuroki, president and CEO of the Japanese daily newspaper *Sekai Nippo*, said, "What the Korean Peninsula and Europe have, or had, in common, is the division of one people: North and South Korea, and East and West Germany."

Connecting to the historical experiences of Europe that can serve as a model for Korean reunification, Mr. Kuroki pointed out the importance of understanding the political, economic and cultural nature of the conflict. In this process of clarification, the media, as leaders or mediators, have a great mission, he said.

He referred to the 2020 US presidential elections when explaining that new forms of media, such as YouTube or social media, can make media coverage strongly questionable and create confusion. Although he said he cherished the idea of freedom of speech, which is reflected by the emergence of ever-newer forms of sharing information, Mr. Kuroki emphasized that this freedom will not undermine the purpose of the media. "In this sense, both old and new media need to reflect upon themselves," he concluded.



Professor Toshio Miyatsuka, the president of the Miyatsuka Korea Institute in Japan, visits the border between China and North Korea several times a year to conduct field work and gather information and items on North Korea.

He recounted his personal experiences as a Japanese who was exposed to the fight between North and South Korea at a very young age. "In the village where I was born in the mountains of Akita Prefecture, there were many Koreans from the Korean Peninsula who had come to Japan before the war," he explained. Professor Miyatsuka also noted that his interest in the conflict peaked when he joined the Japan-DPRK Society, an organization promoting friendship and goodwill between Japan and North Korea.

Motivated to find out more, he commenced media research based on the propaganda war going on in the torn nation of Korea. The main weapons of this war are leaflets, which are mutually dropped off above one country by the other. "They are often referred to as 'flying paper bombs,'" he explained, stating that for North Koreans, these leaflets play a key role in obtaining outside information. Professor Miyatsuka offered his thoughts about the potential of reunification lying in the abolition of nuclear weapons, an aim in which air-distributed leaflets can play a significant role.

During the question-and-answer session Professor Miyatsuka noted that the so-called "paper bombs" are considered to have great potential in unification efforts, as the information coming into North Korea is heavily filtered by the public service broadcaster. As they cannot be contradicted by other media, leaflets give a different perspective to North Koreans.



Lutfi Dervishi, an Albanian journalist and political analyst and a lecturer at the University of Tirana, said that he was familiar with the communist perspective on the media, having been born in the country once known as the "North Korea of Europe."

"In a country where journalism is 100 percent equal to real propaganda, the truth is the first victim," he said. He pointed out the possibility of the media being a driving force of democratization and reconciliation while also potentially being an instrument in the hands of regimes of power.

Mr. Dervishi spoke about a new form of media war developing in the world, one that no longer is fought on the ground of facts but on the ground of opinion. This war, however, is fueled by people being overwhelmed with information, struggling with discerning what is true. "There is a lot of content and little context," he explained.

Today, seeing how Albania shifted from a North Korean model to one closer to the South Korean model, with journalism shifting from propaganda to free media, it is obvious that journalists also have changed, Mr. Dervishi said. Having established that this change is possible everywhere, he added that the challenge the media are facing today is to become a reliable source of information and to deal with misinformation.

Mr. Dervishi expanded on the subject during the question-and-answer session, stating that to eliminate fake news, journalists require an incredible sense of mission in their work. A shift is needed from business journalism to truthful journalism, meaning that truth and just causes need to dominate the news, not solely the will to gain profit and sell content, he said.



Humphrey Hawksley from the United Kingdom, an author, commentator, broadcaster, and long-standing BBC foreign correspondent, began by stating that the media thrive on conflict; thus examining their role in bringing about peace is not an easy task. This is further complicated by the ever-diversifying nature of the media. With the appearance of blogs, social media and other outlets, anyone can become a journalist and it is hardly possible to regard the media as a single entity.

Analyzing recent conflicts, he raised the question of what the role of the media should be, when the destabilizing force stems from the conflict between truth and peace. He also pointed out how different political interests can paint radically different pictures of the same entity.

In the example of how the United Kingdom views China now, and how it did so years ago, Mr. Hawksley noted, "Nothing has changed except the narrative propelled by the governments." He concluded that -- as unsatisfying as it may sound -- politicians are the driving force behind global changes, and reporters only follow their narrative. "The media will do what they've always done: tell a captivating story. Some are good news. Most are bad. That's just how the world is," he said.

During the question-and-answer session, Mr. Hawksley commented on the largely simplified notion of the media thriving solely on dug-up dirt. "There are hundreds of planes in the sky and we are not reporting on them, but if one goes down, we will," he explained. He further examined how responsible consumption is of great importance on the side of the media too, as people tend to put the blame on social media when it comes to fake news, but neglecting the fact that serious news outlets still report on such stories.

Regarding the geopolitical aspect of the Korean Peninsula, Mr. Hawksley warned that it is key that the unification endeavors gain a larger consensus among nations, as without such consensus it can become the scene of proxy wars between ideologies that can hinder all efforts of peacemaking.

At the end of the webinar, Ms. Payne handed over to Mr. Peter Zoehrer, who thanked her and the panelists and made a few announcements about future IMAP programs.

To read a translation of the article posted by Sekai Nippo, a newspaper in Japan, [click here](#).



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International Media Association for Peace 'MEDIA SHOULD REGAIN TRUST'

This is the translation of a report published in the Japanese daily newspaper Sekai Nippo about the International Media Association for Peace webinar.

The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), in which media outlets and journalists from around the world cooperate toward realization of permanent peace, held a webinar under the theme "The Role of the Media in Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula: The Perspective of Japan and Europe" and provided a forum in which journalists and experts from Japan and Europe exchanged opinions.

Lutfi Dervishi, Albania's journalist and prominent host of a political debate program, pointed out that Albania, once a communist country, was called "North Korea in Europe." He said, "In a country where journalism is 100 percent propaganda, the truth is the first to be sacrificed," and emphasized the importance of journalism that conveys the truth to the people.

He mentioned as an example that fake news spread on the Internet contributed to the turmoil when a major earthquake struck Albania in 2019. He said, "When I think about the implications of fake news in the Korean Peninsula, one of the most militarized regions in the world, I feel scared." He argued that the challenge that traditional media face today is "to be a reliable source of information and to deal with disinformation."

Toshio Miyatsuka, the representative of the Miyatsuka Korea Research Institute, mentioned about the propaganda fliers that South Korea and North Korea scatter as part of a "information and propaganda war" and pointed out, "They are important means for North Koreans living under a closed super-dictatorship to obtain outside information. They are indispensable media for freedom, democracy, and human rights." He insisted that "in addition to newspapers, television and the Internet, fliers scattered from the sky also play a major role as a means of appealing to North Korea for the need for denuclearization."

Humphrey Hawksley of the British BBC, who authored a book on China's advance into the South China Sea, said, "The Korean Peninsula is compared to the unification of Germany, but it is unlikely that the Korean Peninsula is unified due to the collapse of China like the Soviet Union."

Masahiro Kuroki, president of the *Sekai Nippo*, said, "The Korean Peninsula and Europe share the common denominator of the divided nation, namely the division of North and South Korea and East and West Germany. Europe's experience and knowledge for regional peacebuilding will be of great help to Japan as a reference."

In the seminar, Thomas McDevitt, chairman of *The Washington Times*, gave a greeting, and former BBC Asia editor Rita Payne served as the moderator.

IMAP was launched in Seoul in February last year, and the Japan Secretariat is operated by the *Sekai Nippo*.

(Detailed information on this webinar will be posted at a later date.)

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Warsaw, Poland—UPF-Poland's first national webinar focused on the reunification of North and South Korea.



United Kingdom

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Australia

Australian Ambassadors for Peace Join Landmine Conference

Sydney, Australia—Australian Ambassadors for Peace presented at a virtual conference on the landmine epidemic.