

IMAP hosted Session Five ILC2021: Perspectives from Media

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Asia Pacific -- The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) hosted Session Five on April 30, 2021, the second day of the International Leadership Conference 2021 (ILC2021) -- Asia Pacific program. Seven prominent journalists and media leaders shared their perspectives on the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula in support of the session theme, "IMAP: Perspectives from Media."

A total of 2,052 people from 42 countries registered for the session, and thousands watched it through YouTube and Facebook. Moreover, Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, chairman of UPF-Asia Pacific garnered an estimated 12,700 viewers via Facebook Live.

Mr. Thomas P. McDewitt, chairman of *The Washington Times* and international coordinator of IMAP, in his opening remarks, spoke about a recent IMAP project called "Partnership for a Free and Responsible Media." The initiative aims to create a framework for identifying major challenges and often overlooked opportunities for the media in the 21st century. He acknowledged the work of UPF founders Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon who have advocated that "a responsible press is a moral press." Moreover, he encouraged the news media to shine a light on dialogue, collaboration, conflict resolution, and most of all, solutions. Media personalities need to promote human development, God-given human rights, social well-being, freedom and prosperity.

The first speaker was **Mr. Bruce Atkinson**, a journalist with *Leader Newspapers* and a business consultant/writer with *The Atkinson Group* in Australia. He emphasized that to secure a peaceful negotiation between the two Koreas, in which all nations, especially the United States and China have a vital role to support, it is essential that tensions be removed. Here the media has a major role to play. Mr. Atkinson said that there are good points of the South Korean government which the North Korean government can learn from and vice versa. He concluded by saying that by doing so it would be possible for the reunification of Korea.

Mr. Ly Tayseng, publisher and CEO of *The Phnom Penh Post* in Cambodia, suggested a way the media can shed light on Korea reunification. Through Cambodia's longstanding ties with both North and South Korea, Cambodia has been a neutral observer of relations between the two Koreas and can play a vital role in facilitating dialogue and negotiations. In addition, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can help ease tensions between the two nations, and next year, in 2022, Cambodia will chair the economic union. He reminded that the three cardinal principles of media are to inform, educate and entertain, and suggested that it would be a good opportunity for the media in Asia to take the lead. The regional media's understanding of regional issues and perspectives, reflecting Asian customs and traditions, would be a valuable contribution, especially in preventing and managing conflict. In this way, regional media and the global media in general can help with disseminating news about the realities on the ground and rebuilding trust among various stakeholders within the Korean Peninsula and the region.

Ms. Adena Mahavong, president of the *Movie Television Laos Co., Ltd*, Laos, spoke about the situation in Laos during this time of COVID-19 and the role of the media as a voice of the government. She said the assistance of neighboring nations in the region is very valuable, such as giving out the vaccines to and

implementing strict health protocols among their citizens during the pandemic.

Mr. Farid Rais, executive producer of *Neo News*, Islamabad, Pakistan, positively believes that "if there is a will, there is a way" for Korean reunification to occur and resolving other global conflicts. He highlighted that the two Koreas share the same culture and values, and therefore, it is very possible for them to end their indifferences and conflict and for peace to be restored on the Korean Peninsula. As the world passes through the pandemic, everyone, especially the media, needs to join hands and focus on a new horizon of peace for the future generations, he also said.



Mr. Sapon Onkgara, news station executive editor of *News1*, Thailand, had a different perspective on the reunification of the two Koreas. He remarked that "maybe negotiations between the two Koreas could be better without the involvement of any major world powers." The leaders of each nation should first talk as neighbors to gradually close the gaps between their differences, while sincerely considering the interests of their people and the benefits reunification would bring to them. He said: "The genuine desire and sincerity towards peace and unification must start with the people who display strong intention to achieve that end." Mr. Onkgara concluded his remarks by reemphasizing that negotiations should start with the leaders of the two nations, as the leaders of their people.

Mr. Sridhar Kumaraswami, senior assistant editor of *The Asian Age* from New Delhi, India, underscored that the media must give valuable feedback on and flag potential dangers in the peace process between the two Koreas. Noting the reunification of Germany as a model of reunification, he remarked that it is up to the two Koreas to decide if they will unite. Furthermore, he pointed out that the media should practice responsible reporting in a concise and balanced manner to restore understanding between nations.

A short QandA session followed, which was facilitated by **Ms. Gabrielle Elizabeth R. Bigol**, assistant professor at the College of Journalism, International Peace Leadership College, Philippines. The role of the media, especially in Asia, in promoting peace; avoiding propaganda in reporting; and resolving conflicts and misunderstanding was emphasized again by the speakers.

Finally, **Dr. Robert S. Kittel**, coordinator of *IMAP-Asia Pacific*, who moderated the entire session, gave the closing remarks. He commended the valuable input that was given and perspectives that were presented by the speakers and encouraged them to support Think Tank 2022, which will be launched by Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon on May 9 at the 6th Rally of Hope.

In the IMAP session, prominent journalists shared different perspectives based on their expertise and experiences, which shed light on and gave hope to the future reunification of North and South Korea. Though reunification may be challenging, with the right mindset, one of mutual understanding and genuine sincerity, among them and the continuous support of world leaders, especially of Asian nations, the doors of the 38th parallel might open sooner than anticipated.