

UPF Asia Pacific's Think Tank 2022 Forum Asia Pacific, Feb. 2: IMAP Session

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Asia Pacific -- The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) hosted the fourth session of the virtual *Think Tank 2022* Forum for UPF's Asia Pacific region on February 2, 2022, which brought together media leaders who shared their perspectives on Korean reunification.

A total of 2,638 people registered for the event. Two hundred and forty (240) participants watched it live on Zoom, while it was viewed thousands of times on YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms.

Mr. Thomas McDevitt, *chairman of The Washington Times*, opened the session by elucidating the "grand strategy" behind UPF's global vision based on interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal values. He commended the organizers for reaching out to the 157 nations that have diplomatic ties with North and South Korea. Next, he called on North Korea to join the global community both economically and through social responsibility. Finally, Mr. McDevitt invited media representatives to work together to have a "transformative impact" and help liberate the human spirit.



Mr. Michael Breen, *CEO of Insight Communication Consultants in South Korea*, gave the first keynote address. After providing a brief historical overview of why Korea was divided and the division remains one of the longest conflicts in modern times, Mr. Breen took on the question of why both North and South Korea still want to be united. Reunification of the peninsula is the national goal of both countries, but it

has been growing weaker over time. Today, reunification among younger South Koreans is being redefined as "peaceful coexistence." Looking forward, Mr. Breen touched on three reasons for Korean reunification: 1) humanitarian concerns (due to the unimaginable suffering in the North), 2) international political linkage where isolated hot points have far-reaching impact and 3) the rise of an undemocratic China. On an optimistic note, the reunification of the two Koreas would have a powerful, positive and yet unforeseen outcomes for the world given the rise of the economic miracle of South Korea. The biggest stumbling block for Korean reunification, according to the speaker who is an honorary citizen of Seoul, is the lack of a common, underlying value system. Central to this is the meaning of "reunification" which entails the inevitable "recovery of the rebel-held territory." With this mindset held in both North and South Korea, reunification, Mr. Breen concluded, is impossible. Values and/or systems need to change for Korea to be a united nation.



Dr. Chheang Vannarith, *president of the Asian Vision Institute in Cambodia*, gave the second keynote address. He acknowledged the need for the Asia Pacific Union initiative which calls for a fresh strategic engagement of a more comprehensive and dynamic manner. This new paradigm shift would have "peaceful coexistence" as its starting point. The plan would be to begin with economic reforms and then move gradually to political reforms. Four steps were outlined: 1) cultural cooperation, 2) economic cooperation and national security, 3) develop the DMZ into a peace park or free trade zone, and 4) international integration. Dr. Vannarith highlighted that lessons of international cooperation can be drawn from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement signed by 15 nations in the Asia Pacific region and spearheaded by Cambodia.

Commentators included:

Mr. Sopon Onkgara *from News 1 Satellite TV and executive editor of the Manager Group, Bangkok, Thailand*, called the aspirations for Korean reunification "noble... but it remains elusive." Nevertheless, Mr. Onkgara added, "it should serve as a challenge to overcome increasingly complex issues."

Mr. Prakash Nanda, *chairman of the Editorial Board of Eurasian Times and editor-in-chief, Indian Century Media Group, India*, noted three examples of national division in Asia. In addition to the two Koreas, India and Pakistan along with China and Taiwan were divided politically and geographically. Mr. Nanda pointed out that in each of these three situations, one country is a liberal democracy and the other, an autocracy.

Mrs. Asel Sartpaeva, *Orbita.kg News Agency, project manager, Kyrgyzstan*, explained the multiple problems that are prohibiting North and South Korea from even signing a peace treaty ending the more than 70-year-long Korean conflict. Histories, ideologies and priorities seem to be preventing this initial first step from taking place.

Dr. Robert S. Kittel, *coordinator of IMAP in the Asia Pacific*, served the moderator and rapporteur for this session.