

Think Tank 2022 Forum, Europe and the Middle East: IAACP and Closing Sessions

Melanie Komagata
February 3, 2022



Europe and the Middle East -- Cultural diplomacy was the theme of the final session of the Think Tank 2022 Global Forum. To view the webinar, [click here](#).

The session, titled "Overcoming Division on the Korean Peninsula through Cultural Diplomacy and the Arts," was held on February 3 by the Europe-Middle East branch of UPF's International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP).

The eight webinars of the Think Tank 2022 Global Forum were held from February 1 to 3 as a precursor to the events of World Summit 2022, which would be held in Seoul, South Korea, and online from February 11 to 13.

The Think Tank 2022 webinars were held not only in Europe and the Middle East but also in Asia, Africa, and the Americas by UPF and its associations. Several of the online sessions were held jointly with UPF associations from other continents.

The IAACP session began with a music video of the U.K. choral group Camden Voices singing the Beatles' song "Here Comes the Sun."



The moderator, **Mélanie Komagata** of UPF Europe and Middle East, explained the background of the webinar and introduced the speaker and panelists.

The keynote speaker was **Dr. Mark Donfried**, the director general of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, based in Germany. He began by describing the concept of "cultural diplomacy" and its evolution throughout history. Cultural diplomacy is "a course of actions which utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other aspects of culture or identity," not only to strengthen relationships but also to enhance sociocultural cooperation or promote national interests. It can be practiced by the public sector, as well as the private sector or civil society. However, it has not always been practiced with good intentions, for example when used sometimes for propaganda reasons and with destructive purposes.



In the case of the Korean Peninsula, Dr. Donfried offered three suggestions:

First, he recommended indirect cultural diplomacy as the most efficient and appropriate way of practicing cultural diplomacy between the two Koreas, rather than applying the classical form. The main goal is not politics but rather a common goal, such as playing music or football together, or the exchange of art and culture. Indirectly, this allows the building of bridges and trust. Indeed, in a complex relationship between countries in conflict, the indirect form of cultural diplomacy is efficient, because the attention is taken away from the differences, and the common purpose is rather put at the center of focus.

Second, Dr. Donfried highlighted the importance of including the civil society in cultural diplomacy when the political situation is complex, which is the case on the Korean Peninsula.

Finally, the newest form of cultural diplomacy is that of listening rather than speaking, and Dr. Donfried emphasized this type as a humble and easy way to build trust on the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, if South Koreans go to the North and listen to the North Korean culture, and if the North Koreans do the same, bridges will be built.

Answering questions, Dr. Donfried pointed out the importance of "pushing as much as we can" to make cultural exchanges possible between the two Koreas, despite North Korea's isolation. He highlighted the importance of asking the local people what they want and what the youth's interest is. Indeed, it is essential to have intermediaries with whom we can work to target the audience. Despite challenges, it is important to start by finding the opportunities to advance and push through -- for example, organizing art exhibitions in North Korea, diplomatic conferences, soccer tournaments, and so on -- with the main purpose of bringing people together indirectly.

The session continued with cultural performances. First, through a recorded video, **Hye-ryun Jung**, a pianist and composer originally from South Korea but currently located in Spain, played the Korean folk song "*Arirang*," which is famous in both North and South Korea and is listed twice as a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, at the request of the two Koreas. Mrs. Jung allowed the participants to discover the melodies that are sung on the whole Korean Peninsula.

The next part of the webinar focused on the culture and art of Korean food. Indeed, many famous dishes, such as *bibimbap* and *naengmyun* (cold noodles), are an important cultural heritage for the Korean people, creating a common ground for citizens of the whole peninsula.

British musician and events technician Réamonn Bateman said: "The food of your homeland has a special warmth, drawing on memories of childhood without cares and worries. The food that is common between the *Daehan Minguk* -- the one great Korean people -- can draw them together beyond words and policies. It demonstrates one aspect of commonality that binds before the dialogue begins."

He then introduced a video he made about **Ji-eun Park**, a Korean national now living in the UK who is passionate about her Korean culture, especially its cuisine, and aspires to popularize it in her adopted country. In the video, Mrs. Park showed how to prepare *bibimbap*, a very traditional Korean dish enjoyed both in North and South Korea. Mr. Bateman said that the dish is easy for anyone to make and enjoy at home.



Next, a video was shown of the **Little Angels Children's Folk Ballet of Korea**, which was established in 1962 by UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. [Sun Myung Moon](#) to share the Korean culture with the world. The video showed the troupe's 1998 performance in North Korea. On their arrival at Pyongyang airport, they were welcomed by their North Korean counterparts. Sharing the same language and culture, they took each other's hands and embraced naturally. The children of the North and the South performed traditional dances and songs with excellence, in front of an enthusiastic and emotional audience.

In 2000, the North Korean children's troupe visited Seoul and were welcomed there. Again, the children of both troupes quickly became close with one another. Investing themselves totally in their art, both troupes opened the hearts of the "enemy" country's audience. Especially when they sang "*Tongil*" (the "Song of Unity"), audience and performers became totally one. In just a few days they overcame, through the arts, the division forced upon them decades earlier. Therefore, parting was all the sadder as they had spent wonderful days together and they knew they might not meet again.

The video was followed by a written testimony of **Jong Hun Kim**, who was part of the Little Angels' visit to North Korea in 1998. Years later, he became the stage manager of the Little Angels School in Seoul. The following text from Mr. Kim was read to the audience:

Just as all humankind is united through K-Pop, even if we cannot feel each other's emotions directly, we can understand and empathize with each other through art, in particular through dance, and I believe that we can become one just by communicating. After the events, we couldn't meet or keep in touch.

"Music as a means to overcome division" was then presented by **Benjamin Lajda**, a Czech cellist and pianist from the Conservatory of Fine Arts and Music in Prague, who also has studied Korean language, culture, and history. He described an international musical project which he co-organized in summer 2017 in South Korea.

Participants from many countries in Europe and also South Korea and Japan took part. The musical pieces performed and shown through clips and video were about gratitude, love, and shared compassion. Mr. Lajda explained that while mastering this piece together, they realized that music doesn't know any boundaries. Despite the musicians' different national backgrounds, they all could see beyond and find a common ground through their shared goal and passion.

Mr. Lajda then presented a performance of the song "*Arirang*" on the cello, piano, flute, and violin, with a

couple of musicians who had become acquainted through the project.

The poems of South Korean poet Ko Un were presented through a creative visual production. **Carlos Badosa**, an audio technician from Spain who was behind the making of the video, first introduced Ko Un, a Korean born in 1933 who lived through the Korean War as a child, became a Buddhist monk, and remained so for 20 years. In the 1970s, he became a political activist and was sent to prison several times.

Mr. Ko has lived a complex life, and therefore, his poetry covers a wide array of themes: Buddhism, a deep contemplation of nature, and also a reflection on the scarred identity of Korea. Mr. Ko also has been a supporter of Korean unification. Indeed, in 2000 he read his poetry at the Korean unification summit in Pyongyang, North Korea, and spoke at the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit.

Mr. Badosa then introduced the six poems from Mr. Ko's compilation *First Person Sorrowful*. These poems were read in a video with background images of Korean landscapes from the four seasons. Through this panel, the audience discovered the beauty of art which transcends all barriers.



David Gonzalez Tejero from Spain, director of the Children's Choir of the Jesuit school of *Nuestra Señora del Recuerdo*, said that in Korea, music is considered a powerful instrument to connect people. "When we hear music, when we sing, when we dance, there is a part of us that connects with ourselves, and when we share it, we connect with other people's feelings. They know it very well in Korea." Indeed, on Korean television, some channels broadcast Korean music the whole day. Korean pop music, now famous all over the world, also testifies to the importance of music in Korea.

Mr. Gonzalez Tejero explained that over many centuries, Koreans have created and preserved the ideal of their country with dance and music.

After his speech, the Children's Choir of *Nuestra Señora del Recuerdo* sang "Tongil" in their auditorium in Madrid, a very famous song that the Korean community sings all around the world as it talks about the desire of the Korean people to be one country and not divided anymore. The children sang it first in English, followed by the original version in the Korean language.

Dr. Donfried then was asked to comment on the performances. He explained that the webinar showed concrete examples of cultural diplomacy being implemented already, and he spoke of how we can keep moving forward. The next step, he said, is to simply start contacting NGOs and other actors to organize artistic, cultural, and sports events with people from the North and the South.

Let us, therefore, do "everything we possibly can with the civil society to create bridges," he said. The one thing not to forget, he said, is that governments come and go, and politics change. However, civil society remains, and that is where the potential lies on both sides to build bridges that ideally can endure.

To conclude the session, the pianist **Hye-ryun Jung** played the song "Forgiveness." Mrs. Jung said that forgiveness is a must, because many terrible acts were committed during the fratricidal war between North and South Korea until the armistice of 1953 finally ended it and the Demilitarized Zone was established between the two Koreas. Forgiveness is a must, she said, in order to overcome the resentments and the hurts on both sides, and to put an end to division. The purpose of her composition, she said, is for forgiveness to melt the pain and for a new history of a reunified Korean Peninsula to begin.



Think Tank 2022 Global Forum Closing Session

The Think Tank 2022 Global Forum on "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula" came to a conclusion, after three days and eight webinars, with a short closing session that was moderated by Mélanie Komagata of UPF Europe and the Middle East. She introduced Dr. Michael Balcomb from the United Kingdom, the regional president for Europe and the Middle East of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization that is affiliated with UPF.

Dr. Balcomb observed that this series of webinars presented many different perspectives. Some opinions and basic facts were not agreed on -- for example, regarding why the Korean War took place.

Some optimistic speakers said that Korean reunification was closer than ever before, Dr. Balcomb said. Others had a more pessimistic opinion regarding the future of the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, this week missiles were fired from North Korea across the Sea of Japan, and meanwhile here in South Korea there's a really brutal presidential election going on, with the candidates missing no opportunity to attack each other.

Some experts have said that this isn't a problem that Koreans can solve by themselves, pointing out that the division of Korea wasn't a Korean idea, Dr. Balcomb said. Others pointed out the importance of the involvement of surrounding powers, and we heard some of the desires and wishes of Japan, China, Russia, and the United States. However, some nations' interests are to rather keep the current situation as it is, he said.

Dr. Balcomb referred to the words of Rev. Dr. William A. McComish, one of the speakers in the February 1 session of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development: "When we look at things from a human perspective, it really looks as if peace could be decades away or even impossible."

However, Dr. Balcomb said -- although it may not be politically correct to say -- there has to be the intervention of God; human efforts alone are not enough. The UPF founders would agree with that, he said, but probably would add that "we shouldn't be sitting around waiting for divine intervention. We have to take action and responsibility."

He reminded the audience of Reverend Moon's words -- that the only way to achieve peace and unification is if North Koreans resolve to love South Korea more than they love their own nation, and if South Koreans resolve to love North Korea more than they love their own nation. Reverend Moon said that the only way to achieve this ambitious ideal is to have couples formed by spouses from the North and the South living all over the peninsula and preventing any conflict. Indeed, in the end, families will make a peaceful world.

Dr. Balcomb concluded his remarks by pointing out the importance of having "faith in each other's goodness and desire to see peace, not just in Korea but wherever we are." In this manner, we can become peacemakers, also by taking what we've learned in these last three days and by applying it wherever we are, "because surely peace starts with me."

Ms. Komagata then closed the session and the Think Tank 2022 Global Forum by thanking all the panelists and the audience.