

Think Tank 2022 Session VI: Diplomacy, Security and Religious Freedom

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South Korea - Former heads of state, senior government officials and parliamentarians from around the world, as well as a prominent faith leader, joined the Think Tank 2022 Forum Session VI of the World Summit 2022. This was co-hosted by UPF and the Royal Government of Cambodia, on February 12, 2022 to discuss the intersection of diplomacy, security and religious freedom in the context of seeking the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea.

Speakers:

Dr. Michael Jenkins, President of UPF International, emphasized the role of religious freedom as a cornerstone of any efforts for peace. Pastor Paula White-Cain, Head, Paula White Ministries, U.S.A., spoke of her time leading the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative. "President Trump was the first U.S. President to hold a meeting at the United Nations on protecting religious freedom around the world where he personally called on the nations of the world to end religious persecution. We followed up on that event with an Executive Order advancing International Religious Freedom that solidifies America's stand on this critical issue by naming it a foreign policy priority of the United States and promising we will respect and vigorously promote religious freedom." She encouraged all to follow the biblical exhortation to be peacemakers. "Jesus' fundamental teaching is to love your enemies, for this is one of the greatest secrets to achieving peace. You're the epitome of Matthew 5:9 - 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.'"

Hon. Shim Jae Kwon, Chairperson (2012-2016) of the Korean National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee, outlined the history of efforts to unite the Korean Peninsula. "Korea has been divided for 74 years as of now. During this time almost 4 million people have lost their lives because of the Korean war, a tragic civil war." The process was stagnant until the fall of the Soviet Union and collapse of the communist Eastern Bloc. Then North Korea's leader Kim Il Sung suggested parameters for a loosely federated Korean nation. The 2000 National Summit of the two presidents (North and South) generated a joint declaration. "The June 15th Joint Declaration was a historic breakthrough showing the two Korea's strong will toward reunification." Tragically this agreement broke down, and by 2006 the DPRK began nuclear weapons testing. "All the former promises of working toward peaceful reunification were thrown away. Things got very tough." The Trump administration made major diplomatic advances to deal with the nuclear issue, but these broke down at the failure of the Hanoi Summit. Hon. Shim stated, "I do believe it is not too late. We can take action now. If the three parties (North Korea, South Korea and the United States) try to act together, these problems can be overcome."

Amb. Callista L. Gingrich, U.S. Ambassador (2017-2021) to the Holy See, spoke of the imperative to seek religious freedom by describing what happens when it is absent. "For decades, the North Korean government has denied the Korean people their fundamental right to worship freely. Through fear, intimidation and retribution, the Kim regime has repressed freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Those who practice their faith are subject to execution, torture, physical abuse, or arrest. Some organizations estimate that at least 50,000-70,000 Christians are in prison for exercising their religious beliefs in North Korea." She described the many ways the Trump administration worked with the Vatican to establish this foundational understanding when addressing national issues. "Religious freedom is a key building block of peace and security. This fundamental human right is a bulwark against the forces of extremism and tyranny and provides the foundation upon which societies can thrive. In the United States, the right to worship freely is often called America's first freedom. It is a necessary component of U. S. foreign policy and our commitment to ensuring a more peaceful world." Finally, she exhorted cooperation between the many facets of society to reach this goal. "All of us, across governments, civil society, and faith-based organizations, must work together to build bridges that facilitate tolerance and understanding."

UPF President Dr. Michael Jenkins stressed: "To attain peace, we need to acknowledge God. Politics alone will not do it. It is a fundamental principle to bring together political and religious leaders to bring success."

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister (2006-2015) of Canada, also focused on the topic of religious freedom. He discussed how the foundations of a nation determine their conduct. "Let us begin by reminding ourselves that the Republic of Korea has never sought the reunification of the peninsula through force. It has been focused on the progress of its citizens, not military conquest. But the DPRK has sought military conquest, not only through the war of 1950 to 1953, but also through its relentless development of military capabilities at literally any cost to its citizens over many decades. This difference in the fundamental priorities of the two states stems directly from the fundamentally different nature of their systems." He reflected on what they had done in Canada. "In Canada we asked: 'What can be done to

establish culture and conditions for democracy to take root?' For this reason, my government established the office of religious freedom." When individuals opposed this and asked for freedom from religion, he countered them. "It is not only religion that can be extreme; it is the lack of religion that can also be extreme. It is certainly undemocratic and dangerous to negate all other political viewpoints by claiming to speak for God. It is equally undemocratic and dangerous to claim that one can negate all other political viewpoints in the name of a mere human being." He also acknowledged that religious freedom does not solve all problems. "Freedom of religion is the reminder that by being conceived in God's image, we are important. But because we are not God, there must be limits on our power."

Hon. Dan Burton, member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1983-2013) and international Co-Chair of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), acknowledged that Dr. Moon is doing more for peace than anyone I have seen on the global stage and we sincerely thank her because without her, none of us would be able to be part of this great WS 2022 today. UPF and the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace have almost 7000 parliamentarians working together and our conclusion is that we need more action by more people."

Hon. Jose de Venecia, Jr., Chair Emeritus of Universal Peace Federation, and International Co-Chair of IAPP, issued an official virtual statement as Chairman of International Conference of Asia Political Parties. In his remarks, he promoted the feasibility of establishing a loose Confederation for the two Koreas, until at some point in the future, they can become a united Republic, with alternating presidency. He stated that it is possible if there is a common will, with the support of the U.S., China, Russia and Japan, and with ASEAN, the European Union and the UN providing guidance and active support. He mentioned that Asia and the global community must build on the efforts of historic, direct talks between U.S. President Donald Trump, North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, which will eventually lead to a roadmap to eventual unification and lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula. Although students of realpolitik may say this is wishful thinking, Hon. De Venecia emphasized that this is how impossible initiatives begin.

H.E. Jimmy Morales, President (2016-2020) of Guatemala participated by video to encourage immediate action over mere discussion to seek peaceful solutions for our world in the midst of continued poverty. "If we can achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula, it is possible to attain it in the whole world. Peace can be pursued through more than a Track I diplomatic path."

H.E. Rosalia Arteaga Serrano, President (1997) of Ecuador, added her concerns about the "challenge of asymmetry between the very wealthy and poor countries." She referenced the reunification of East and West Germany that made dreams possible for their peoples and noted that "peace is not just the situation between countries, it is dealing with our own lives."

Hon. Mike Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State (2018-2021) and CIA director (2017-2018), focused his remarks on the contrast of societal values: "In our administration, we sought peace through strength by seeking dignity of people. This is not only an American mission but a mission for the West to allow every person to practice faith as they so choose." In the process of seeking Korean reunification, he stated, "We will never forget the suffering of this nation. We remember the division of this country. We believed we were close to achieving peace when I visited Kim Jong-un. In spite of the work that remains to be done, there is a path forward to peace." He held a cautious stance toward China. "The Chinese Communist Party does not share our values. Chinese aggression continues today. America must confront this and work with our friends of peace-loving nations and peoples - first and foremost, through diplomacy. That is why we shared our vision with Chairman Kim. Our vision would have made the lives of people there better. We did not place sanctions on North Korea to punish them, but to make the way of peace clearer."

The final speaker, Hon. Mark Esper, U.S. Secretary of Defense (2019-2021), focused on strategic perspectives. "Too many suffer in the world's biggest prison: North Korea. Too often we put the urgent before the important issues. Our opponents exploit our inattention. America's presence in the Middle East demonstrates this. During this time, China has built the largest military in the world. Russia's military has modernized. Both Putin and Xi Jinping are propping up North Korea. We can't control the actions of China, Russia and North Korea, but we can control our own abilities. We must work closer together collaboratively in all domains: technology, military and economics. We must commit to engage China together showing resolve and determination so they will pursue different approaches that respect international law and norms. We must expand our cooperation to India, New Zealand and beyond. This should be done multilaterally, engaging all democratic bodies. We must bolster our armed forces and exercise them more jointly. A strong military will buttress our diplomacy. The U.S. must lead with our values - the virtues of democracy and God-given religious rights."

Chairman of UPF International, Dr. Thomas Walsh, concluded the gathering inviting all the participants to affirm the Seoul Resolution for Peace on the Korean Peninsula.