

Inside the Heart of North Korea

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Some of the work Unificationists carry out around the world requires great discretion. Although this can mean that we cannot freely report about some of the most amazing projects in their early days, it is very heartwarming to now be able to offer these words (which were originally recorded in an interview with Antonio in his Washington office) to the worldwide readership. Antonio requested that Today's World state, and we hereby do, that the ideas expressed in these articles are his alone, and do not necessarily represent those of the Unification Church or Unification community in general.

MY focus over the last twenty years, initially with CAUSA — later with AULA (the Association for the Unity of Latin America), the Summit Council for World Peace, the International Security Council and the Federation for World Peace — has been to reach out to the international community and to the top level of world leadership, such as active and former prime ministers, presidents, heads of government, and heads of state, through the above-mentioned organizations. Our job has focused on the original purpose Father gave to the Summit Club, which preceded the Summit Council for World Peace in 1981, that is, to provide a forum, infrastructure, and an organization for world leaders where they can put their statesmanship and experience to good use for the sake of peace and development around the world.

One of the things that we have done is to create and pioneer certain standards and ways of approaching leaders from many fields as well as of organizing conferences adopted by other church organizations that later entered the national and international arena. We had no prior experience in dealing with presidents and other leaders in the political corridors of power. When we began with CAUSA back in 1980, we were in

totally unknown territory.

I remember going to meet with prime ministers or presidents of countries and having no idea what I was going to say. I only knew that I felt it was God's desire that I meet with the head of state or national leader and tell them about our movement, and how our ideas were good for their country,



Antonio Betancourt with Premier Kim Il Sung in 1994

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and specifically for their young people. My intention was to secure an appointment to receive Dr. Bo Hi Pak as special envoy of our founder. This type of outreach began in Bolivia when CAUSA International was founded in 1980, then spread to Argentina, Paraguay,

Uruguay, Brazil, the United States and ultimately around the world. The purpose of CAUSA, which eventually was fulfilled, was to present an ideologically God-centered solution to communism, and to introduce Unificationism or Godism.

I could never have achieved this without the help of 24-hour prayer. It was not just a prayer condition of forty minutes or an hour, although we did those. It was constant, 24-hour communion with God through True Parents. I would talk to Heavenly Father with my mind as I went to the interview, as I sat waiting to be received by the president, and as I was introduced to him. In conducting my visit I would be in constant mental give and take with Heavenly Father, with the understanding that I was not by myself capable of doing this work.

I was trained neither professionally nor academically in school, college, or diplomatic academy to do what I was doing. I needed God, through True Parents, to work with me. Mentally, every step of the way, I would ask, "Heavenly Father, what would you do, what would you say to what he is saying, what would you reply? You are the one who knows what this person needs and what this country needs. You are the one who knows the situation of this nation." I always prayed deeply for clarity in my mind, clarity of purpose and ideas, and clarity to know what needs to be done to advance God's providence.

I found myself saying the most profound things that I would never have thought of otherwise. The president would be so moved and touched by the things that I was saying. Day after day, experience after experience, was a testimony to the spirit of God leading our diplomatic work. Through that, we were able to establish a network in many countries. We began in Latin America and expanded to Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa.

Today, after twenty years, we are in a position to serve the movement as advisors and facilitators. We use our experience to help the missionaries in the field, the national messiahs, offering practical advice and contacts to facilitate their work, so that we can exceed or surpass what we did in the 1980s and 1990s.

We are always ready to offer our limited resources. For example, some time ago there was terrible misunderstanding on the part of the Philippine government regarding our blessing ceremony, and a great controversy about the roles of the Korean men and the Filipino women who had participated in the joint blessing. We requested and received support from our highest level contacts in America to impress upon President Ramos' government the truth about the role of our movement in the Philippines, and to clarify and defuse all the explosive words our detractors and enemies were using to try to destroy our movement in that country.

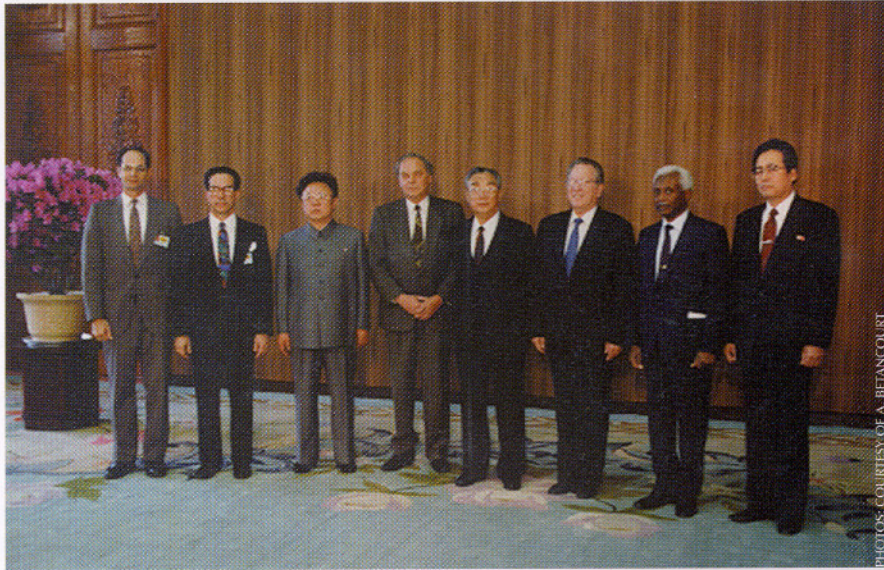
The welcomes our True Parents have received from heads of state in Latin

American recent years has partly been the result of the Summit Council's efforts. We have reached out to the highest leaders in Latin America and other parts of the world and explained to them the value and contributions of our movement and thus inspired them to treat True Parents with proper protocol and dignity.

The Summit Council and the Federation for World Peace are equipped and trained both through our experience over many years and our high level contacts around the world to be a force for peace on behalf of True Parents. We have the desire and capability to support True Parents in their emergence as major players in the affairs of conflict resolution, economic justice, and world development through our contacts and liaison with international financial and technological institutions, and with people who are making very positive things happen in America and beyond.

The Path to North Korea

After successful meetings with the North Korean delegation to the United Nations in New York in the spring of 1990, Father appointed me his special envoy to North Korea. It was decided that in my travels around the world that if there was an embassy for North Korea in the city, I should step into that embassy. I was to present myself as a special envoy of Reverend Moon and testify about the Unification Church, our worldwide work, and why we were good for North Korea. Furthermore, I was to explain that our stance in rela-



Antonio Betancourt and Bill Selig (second from left and far left) and members of the Summit Council's Commission on Korean Reunification meet with Premier Kim Il Sung and General Kim Jong Il in their homeland of North Korea

tion to North Korea was no longer one of confrontation and conflict, but that we were promoting reconciliation and the healing of the past, and looking for a way to work together toward the unification of both Koreas and the creation of a new Korea with God at its center.

Because of our controversial past, I was kicked out of several embassies. In some places I found myself persona non grata, for example, in Moscow and Beijing; even though they welcomed me as a director of an international NGO, when I told them who I was, the ambassador would stand up and leave, and ask his people to escort me out. They were very upset. I was determined to enter North Korea because I felt that the Summit Council could do a lot of humanitarian good for Korea, promote unification, and help change the image that North Korea had of True Parents and our movement. Father requested me to personally meet with

Premier Kim Il Sung on his behalf, but it was impossible for me to get a visa since the North Koreans knew clearly who I was and who I represented.

With the encouragement of Dr. Pak, I eventually requested the support of one of our Summit Council members, a former president of Costa Rica. Through him, we were able to enter North Korea. They gave us a visa to visit the country knowing that I was a delegate of Reverend Moon and a member of the Unification Church. In that sense, I broke through because up to that point, to my knowledge, they had not received anyone officially representing the Unification Church and Reverend Moon.

We met with the late Premier Kim Il Sung and other important officials. We realized that unification could be promoted by helping to remove the barriers to the relationship between the United States and North Korea. This process is not just a North-South Korean issue, but something in which America plays a major role for many reasons.

One of these is the presence of 37,000 American troops south of the 38th parallel, a deployment

that goes back to the Korean War for which there is as yet no final settlement. Another is North Korea's alleged pursuance of a nuclear weapons program that could trigger an arms race of weapons of mass destruction in North-east Asia.

Under the guidance of Dr. Bo Hi Pak, the Summit Council received assistance from those having significant and appropriate influence in the corridors of power. Through these contacts, we expressed what we felt to be the importance of upgrading the discussion to a level that could effect changes in US-North Korean policy. With the support of the members of the Summit Council, former presidents and heads of state who became part of the commission on Korean reunification, and other prestigious citizens with whom we had been able to build relationships, we contributed to North Korea's being given greater priority on the US international

agenda. We nourished the dialogue once it had begun: through bringing US dignitaries to North Korea we assisted Pyongyang in understanding the US and what they could do to improve relations with the United States. Summit Council efforts helped open the way for True Parents' historic trip to North Korea in 1991 [when Father met with Premier Kim Il Sung], which set the course for the Summit Council in its pursuit of peace and the resolution of conflict through dialogue for the Korean peninsula in the 1990s and beyond.

Always under consultation with Dr. Pak, I shuttled back and forth between Washington and Pyongyang. I met five times with the late Premier Kim Il Sung and twice had the opportunity to meet with General Kim Jong Il. I was the only American to attend Premier Kim's funeral. I was in Pyongyang the day he died. I left the same morning, only to return two days later when they invited me to be present at the funeral together with Dr. Bo Hi Pak.

When the famine started in North Korea back in 1995, and the problem was totally new, the Summit Council worked to help alert the world about the hunger problem. I traveled to Europe and spoke in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe with members of the European parliament. I spoke in France with President Mitterrand's advisors on Korea. I

spoke with the Korea desk at the US State Department and with the United Nations. Through our contacts, we impressed upon some of the western governments that it was important for them to consider assisting North Korea through the UN. When the UN launched its famine appeal for North Korea, our Summit Council members were already in place to advise their countries to help. We have been doing a lot of humanitarian work for North Korea behind the scenes.

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The South Koreans and Americans need to grow in heart and intellect about the real situation in North Korea. Both countries need a long-term vision on how to engage the North. Of primary importance is to stop using food as an economic tool for foreign policy. Food and other humanitarian assistance should be given without any strings attached. Our movement should continue to assist, especially in educating the world so that it can better understand North Korea.

We are peacemakers, unifiers, and harmonizers. The leadership in North



Korea needs to understand that they need God and True Parents. As children we all need parents and the unconditional love that comes from parents. True Father and Mother are not just some leaders who want to lead or influence North Korea, politically or economically. They come in the position of True Parents to raise this country to what it should be in the region and world. We will continue to help and to raise the consciousness of leaders in South Korea and the United States to guide North Korea out of its present predicament with respect and dignity, and eventually to the unification of both Koreas which is the will of God.

Today through the Federation for World Peace, AULA, and other offshoots of the Summit Council, such as the World Institute for Development and Peace, our work continues and expands in areas important for the providence.◆

[Edited for Today's World]