

Rally of Hope draws 1 million attendees seeking peace for Korean peninsula

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November 22, 2020

The Washington Times



Members of North Korea's military divisions attend a meeting to pay respect to late leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il at the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, North Korea, Friday, Nov. 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Jon Chol Jin)

Divisions remain between North and [South Korea](#) 70 years after war broke out, but love, compassion and a mutual respect for friends and foes alike can heal old wounds and finally restore unity on the Korean Peninsula, current and former heads of state and prominent U.S. political figures said Saturday at a major international rally.

The "Rally of Hope," organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), drew more than 1 million participants from around the world and offered a powerful virtual platform for the global fight against oppression, poverty and racial discrimination.

This month's rally -- the third such event since August, with a fourth scheduled for December -- marked the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, which claimed millions of lives, divided families and sparked seven decades of distrust between Seoul and [Pyongyang](#).

But speakers at Saturday's event struck an optimistic tone and argued that despite the heavy barriers that still stand in the way of peace and reunification, there is real reason for hope.

Former Rep. Charles Rangel, a New York Democrat who served in the Army's 2nd Infantry Division

during the Korean War, said his own personal experience should serve as a reminder that periods of violence and struggle can ultimately give way to something positive.

Mr. Rangel recounted how his unit was encircled by Chinese forces near the Yalu River, and how he was one of the few who came home.

"I was wounded, left for dead, yet survived," he said. "And when I left Korea, I said to myself, 'I never, never want to return to this situation that brought so much misery and pain to me.' But over the years, as I served in Congress and visited the great leaders in [South Korea](#), I was able to see that the country that I left, that was reduced to ashes, hopelessness and pain, grew out of these ashes to become a symbol of democracy, freedom, and economic expansion, and [an] ally to the great United States of America."

In addition to Mr. Rangel and other North American officials, a host of influential world leaders also spoke at Saturday's rally, including Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and German Alcides Blanco Alvarez, speaker of the Colombian parliament.

In her address, Ms. Zewde spoke about broad themes of unity, human rights and respect for all people, all of which were central tenets of Saturday's rally.

"Let us work to heal the broken trust that has fractured societies. Let us encourage facts and truth instead of hatred and bigotry," she said. "Let us protect marginalized and vulnerable populations. And let us all strive to create fair, equitable, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient societies."

Those goals also have been a driving force in the life of UPF co-founder Hak Ja Han Moon, the leader of the Unification Church and wife of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The two devoted their lives to the promotion of world peace and the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

In a nod to global cooperation, the Rally of Hope featured a performance by the Little Angels Folk Ballet of Korea, which performed a special tribute to the 16 United Nations members that provided troops and support to [South Korea](#) during the Korean War.

In her own remarks at the event, Mrs. Moon said the soldiers that defended [South Korea](#) 70 years ago were fighting for a truly noble cause.

"How incredible it is that the 16 member U.N. nations sent their gallant and valiant young soldiers, many of them in their teens and 20s, to come and protect Korea's freedom and democracy," she said. "The young men and women who came to aid Korea's freedom and democracy were truly the children of God ... We can see through this that God the creator is working with us."

Reuniting Korea is a key pillar of the Unification movement that grew from the Unification Church that the Rev. Moon founded in 1954. Mrs. Moon has led the movement since a few years before the 2012 death of the Rev. Moon, whose ministry grew from a tiny, embattled church in [South Korea](#) to a global spiritual movement and an affiliated commercial empire comprising real estate, manufacturing and agricultural operations, as well as media properties including The Washington Times.

Every person has a role

One hurdle in the way of that reunification goal is [Pyongyang](#)'s nuclear weapons program, which the U.S. and its allies consider a threat not only to the region but to the entire world.

Denuclearization of the peninsula has been a top foreign policy priority for President Trump, who has held three historic in-person meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. The White House tried to strike a deal in which [Pyongyang](#) would give up all its nuclear weapons ambitions in exchange for a massive influx of economic aid and investment, but that deal never materialized.

It's unclear exactly what tack presumptive President-elect Joseph R. Biden, a Democrat, will take on North Korea. He's been highly critical of Mr. Trump's decision to meet in person with Mr. Kim, dubbing the North Korean leader a "thug" and stressing that China must be a central player in any talks with [Pyongyang](#).

Former top American officials say diplomacy will, as always, be crucial. But they also said that everyone -- not just politicians -- can offer something to the cause of peace.

"I do hope as we look forward through this meeting and many others that we can continue to move forward in our understanding of what needs to be done, how we can overcome this division, how we can make a world that is safe for all of us," said Christopher Hill, former U.S. ambassador to [South Korea](#).

"To be sure, diplomacy has to play an important role, but I think every person has a role to play in trying to bridge divisions," he said.

World leaders argued that it is only by bridging divisions and pursuing peace that humanity can address its most daunting challenges.

"Without peace, we cannot mitigate climate change. We cannot fight the COVID-19 pandemic or even think of addressing global poverty," said Mr. Mayardit, the South Sudanese leader. "The environment of perpetual conflict is the prime enemy of human progress. We all know that war drains both material and human resources and diverts attention away from present national priorities, and it prevents countries from achieving their potential."

Achieving the goal of Korean reunification may seem far off, but former heads of state found reasons to be hopeful. Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, for example, pointed to the recent Abraham Accords as fresh evidence of how historic divisions can crumble and new friendships emerge, and he suggested that similar breakthroughs can take place elsewhere around the world.

The Abraham Accords, a landmark achievement of the Trump administration, established formal diplomatic ties between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates for the first time. The agreement is widely viewed as a potential first step toward broader Arab recognition and diplomatic engagement with Israel.

"We have witnessed one of the most unifying developments of modern times," Mr. Harper said. "In the Middle East, nations long and profoundly divided, have put aside their differences with the signing of the Abraham Accords."

"They have not only achieved an unprecedented peace, they've also demonstrated that faith and the common quest for reconciliation between man and God can be a great unifier of humanity," he said.