

UPF Canada Continues Series: Viewing North Korea from Within - Part 3

Robert Duffy
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UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION
A Global Network of Peacebuilders
CANADA & EUME

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10:00 AM ET (North America) / 16:00 CET (Europe)
Scan code QR to Register or Click the link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/812AocDmrTkoH9yzYaQTJ1sFsQPuvD8bkoNe>

Viewing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) from Within - Part 3

Mr. Torben Bjarke-Henriksen
Red Cross, Norway

Mr. Suhae Kim
President, Korean Federation in Canada

Dr. Alexander Vorontsov
Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian

Prof. Joseph H. Chung
University of Québec in Montréal (UQAM)

Mr. Jacques Marion
Co-chair, UPF Europe and Middle-East

Dr. Franco Famularo
President, FPU Canada

Mr. Robert Duffy
Secretary-General, UPF Canada

In the third of this series, Mr. Torben Bjarke-Henriksen of the Red Cross based in Norway will share about his extensive experience in humanitarian efforts within the DPRK. Dr. Alexander Vorontsov, head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and who has lived in the DPRK will provide insights from a scholarly viewpoint. Mr. Suhae Kim a Korean businessman living in Canada, will share about every day life in the DPRK. Professor Joseph Chung will share his views on Juche philosophy.

Please Register in advance for this meeting.
After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.
Interpretation is available in French, Korean and Russian.

Canada -- Continuing with our series of webinars which began in March of this year under the title of "Viewing the DPRK from Within," this third webinar which took place on June 23, 2022 brought UPF-Canada in conjunction with UPF-EUME together with parties from Norway, the Russian Federation and Canada, all of whom have travelled extensively within the DPRK, and who shared with our audience insights and experiences that revealed a little more of the real life they enjoyed in North Korea.



Introduced by Robert Duffy, secretary-general of UPF-Canada and moderated by Dr. Franco Famularo, president of UPF-Canada, the webinar began with comments from **Mr. Torben Bjarke-Henriksen** of the

Red Cross based in Norway, who shared about his travels and friendships while engaging in humanitarian efforts within the DPRK on behalf of the Red Cross. His anecdotes and photos revealed different aspects of social reality on the ground as he and his team engaged with the North Koreans in their work for local people throughout the country. His final anecdote was one in which he had the occasion to play soccer with some local kids, and to his surprise, one of them had a favorite western soccer team, Barcelona, and his favorite player was Messi, which was to say that many North Koreans know much more about the world than one would suspect from Western media portrayals of life there.



Next, **Mr. Suhae Kim**, a Korean businessman living in Canada, shared via an interview-styled dialogue with Prof. Joseph H. Chung about his experience of everyday life in the DPRK. Since 1994 until the pandemic, he has visited his sister there twice a year. Through his observations, he has developed a sense of how the society works in the DPRK from the point of view of a professional engineer who has worked in Saudi Arabia and around the world on international engineering projects.

Kim gave a most useful explanation of how North Korean society works in describing the DPRK society as a body, with the head guiding the body for general well-being, and the cells of the body, the individual citizens, responding to and supporting the head. The social contract between leadership and people, he explained, is a kind of "Confucian socialism" in which Confucianist values are characteristic of the leadership's approach to governance, while at the same time shows qualities of a humanistic social order similar to socialist societies elsewhere in which the elites share experiences with the common people. He cited the example of army generals who spend one month every year with the rank-and-file soldiers, cooking and generally serving them. This type of social interaction contributes to the sense of a national "family ethic" and the confluence of Confucianist values with the Juche philosophy of self-reliance. This concept of self-reliance, he said, is not only applicable to the individual and family, but also to the nation as a whole. "Juche spirit," he said, overcomes foreign colonialism and economic sanctions. It is the basis for national defense in which all citizens share responsibility and sacrifice accordingly. The Juche concept includes the idea that human value comes not from one's job and social status but from being a citizen, a member of the national "family" and one who contributes to the nation's goals and ideals.

Third, **Dr. Alexander Vorontsov**, head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has lived in the DPRK both as a student and as a diplomat attached to the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang. He provided insights from his experience there in his student days as well as his time in the diplomatic corps and more recently as an academic.

He remembered the contrast between the portrayals of infrastructural developments in the DPRK by the media, as existing only for the elites, and the reality which he encountered. As the country's modernization was moving forward, he experienced that new appliances and electronic devices were becoming widespread, that there was a general lifting of the society economically. Of course, sanctions have limited the growth rate, but nevertheless, evidence of world-class elements could be seen -- for example from the highly sophisticated and architecturally interesting new buildings in downtown Pyongyang to the coffee culture, complete with modern machines for the most sophisticated drinks, with baristas in clean, modern suits. At the same time, he said that to open a small business might be easier in a city outside the capital, since as capital cities everywhere, Pyongyang is more of a showcase for the country than a center for small businesses.

Dr. Vorontsov agreed with Mr. Henriksen that if North Koreans go abroad, they will learn more about the world, and will bring that knowledge back home with them. Indeed, they were travelling abroad to work, and were supporting those at home with their salaries. However, the sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council from 2006 steadily increased thereafter and eventually forced this overseas work force to return home, thus cutting off this important source of foreign income on which many families relied.

Due to some difficulties with the sound, we were unable to capture the full value of Dr. Vorontsov's presentation, but we are hopeful that in the future, we will be able to hear his perspective again.



Then **M. Jacques Marion**, UPF co-chair for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, was asked to say a few words from the UPF viewpoint on the webinars exploring life in the DPRK in more depth. He shared that UPF has a special interest and love for Korea since its founders, Dr. and Mrs. Moon, were born in what is now North Korea. He mentioned the Peace Road project in which UPF branches were involved with North Korea, and suggested that not only Koreans, but "the world itself will benefit from the reunification of the peninsula." Further elaborating, he described in brief the founders' vision for a bridge-tunnel connection between Japan and Korea, and a similar connection at the Bering Strait between Russia and America joined by an international highway system connecting the whole world.

Finally, a **Q and A session** revealed in part that most men serve in the armed forces for a period of seven or eight years, during which time they learn skills they can use after their service in beneficial work. Mr. Henriksen reported having seen many uniformed armed services personnel doing agricultural work in the countryside, implying that the armed forces may be involved in this work as a permanent part of their mandate.

The question of Juche philosophy, which is central to the DPRK, but little understood, was tackled by **Professor Joseph H. Chung**, former professor of economics at the University of Quebec at Montreal. Since retirement, he has made a study of the subject as part of his general interest in Korean reunification. He explained that Juche thought means more than independence, self-reliance, autonomy, self-sufficiency -- thinking, acting and problem-solving without interference. As an ideology, it means that the value of the people and the value of the leader are infused into one. This was Kim Il Sung's idea of Juche. Juche is realized through education, sports, cinema and music and reflects a concerted national passion for unity and oneness of heart in the direction of the nation. This unity constitutes the salvation of the individual citizens as they participate in national life, devotion to the leader and nation-building. He concluded that Juche strengthened the character of North Koreans and helped them overcome hardships such as those in the 90s after the fall of the Soviet Union, the sanctions of the 2000s and the more recent military exercises of neighbors in their backyard.

Further questions centered around the economy and the phenomenon of local markets, and secondly, the subject of reunification.

The webinar closed with the feeling that there was much more to explore, and with the hope that these efforts at bringing real life in the DPRK to light would continue. The statistics received from our UPF Russia colleagues showed that our webinar had received over 46,000 views on the OK Russia website and the associated article received over 89,000 views as of June 24.

To see a video of the webinar in English, [click here](#). [French](#) - [Korean](#)