

UPF Geneva, Switzerland experts set out proposals for Korean reunification

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Geneva, Switzerland—Experts set out proposals for Korean reunification during a discussion co-sponsored by UPF.

Together with the International Network for a Neutral Korea (INNK), the Swiss chapter of UPF held the event in its offices in Geneva. The date, June 20, 2023, was chosen to commemorate the start of the fratricidal Korean War 73 years earlier.



The conference, which took place parallel to the 53rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, located in Geneva, was titled “Toward the Enhancement of Human Rights in North Korea—Neutrality of the Two Koreas as a Path to Lasting Peace.”

In addition to the audience that gathered at the UPF offices, a number of viewers participated online via Zoom or Facebook.

Chantal Chételat Komagata, coordinator of UPF-Europe, recalled the UPF founders’ efforts over the past decades to reunify the Korean Peninsula in order to overcome the divisions between conflicting ideologies in the world.

This was the third conference that UPF had organized on the theme of Korean neutrality, Mrs. Komagata said. The many reflections and talks from experts had given access to a deeper understanding of what

neutrality can be and how it can be applied to the Korean Peninsula, she said.

Two of the panelists of the June 20 meeting had flown from South Korea and had just completed a seven-day visit to the neutral nations of Switzerland and Austria, with six other advocates, to investigate neutrality on the ground. What they reported are their conclusions and vision of a neutral peninsula leading to peace, security, unification and human rights.



The first speaker was the acting secretary general of the co-sponsoring organization, INNK: **Dr. Sang Woo Lim, Ph.D.**, a former vice president of Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea, as well as a professor emeritus in the History Department of that same university.

His speech, “Neutrality and Self-Determination of the Two Koreas for Peace in Northeast Asia,” was divided into five sections:

- Permanent Neutrality and the Confederation of Korean States;
- The Principle of “Neutrality First, Unification Next”;
- Rights and Duties as a Neutral Country;
- Peace Treaty of the Korean Peninsula as a Peace-Making Solution; and
- Korea Economic Community and Northeast Asia Free Economic Zone.

His speech presented a very clear roadmap for going forward, and it seemed that this could be realized within a short period of time if the governments on each side were ready to act.

Dr. Vana Kim Hansen, Ed.D., co-chair of the Council for a Neutral Unified Korea, coordinator of the 2023 INNK Swiss-Austria civilian diplomacy, and co-organizer of the 2015 Women Cross DMZ, spoke on “Neutrality as a Path toward South Korean Self-Determination for Peace in Northeast Asia.”

Neutrality is the path toward South Korea’s self-determination, she said, emphasizing the spiritual-mental-emotional component of the process. She touched the hearts of the participants when mentioning *Hongik Ingan* (“To broadly benefit the human world”), the official educational motto of South Korea, and the common heritage that both Koreas have had for thousands of years. Things could change quickly if the awareness of the people on the peninsula could be raised to a higher state, she said.

Heiner Handschin, the president of UPF-Switzerland and the UPF liaison with the UN office in Geneva, spoke of the many projects and events that UPF and its affiliated organization Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP) have undertaken in the past 20 years to promote and contribute to peace on the Korean Peninsula. He mentioned the need for the United Nations to open a fifth office in Asia and pointed to the Demilitarized Zone as the optimal place for that, as it would create a neutral buffer and international meeting place on the 38th parallel.

Dr. Claude Béglé, a former member of the Federal Assembly (the Swiss parliament) and the chairman of Swiss NeWater and SymbioSwiss, started off speaking of Swiss neutrality, which sometimes was used as a selfish tool but became brilliant after World War II as it allowed Switzerland to be a mediator between many powers and a possible role-player in the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. He then responded to a few of the statements made by the three speakers.

Dr. Béglé agreed with 90 percent of Dr. Lim’s statements, about permanent neutrality linked to the right of self-determination; the confederation of one nation with two states; and the economic aspect, indispensable in order to build bridges between the two states and eliminate disparities.

However, he questioned the joint foreign policy between “South Korea, a puppet of the U.S., and North Korea, a puppet of self and of China.” Just as with the leveling of the economies, he assumed that self-defense would take time and that the emphasis should be put on economy first and only later on foreign policy and self-defense. He also hinted at the difficulty of both Koreas to get out of the thinking that it is right and the other is wrong, and to focus on the best way to get rid of the tutors, who “had been invited but needed to leave.”

Dr. Béglé agreed with Dr. Hansen’s assumption that South Korea had made a huge contribution to the U.S. He appreciated her mentioning the spiritual-mental-emotional aspect of the issue. Dr. Béglé agreed that there is a need to emphasize “the founding ideology, the same original culture, as a solid base to build again a common identity,” using the long common ground as the key element to erase what has happened since the end of World War II. He also agreed that reconciliation should be undertaken using baby steps.

With Mr. Handschin, Dr. Béglé agreed that the division of Korea was not acceptable and that the United States was more involved than the others in the four-party talks, as it had strategic interests in being present in the region to protect its value system in front of Russia and China. Things have changed and both Koreas have grown up, Dr. Béglé said; therefore, the presence of the superpowers is no longer necessary. He also stressed the need to enter into a dialogue and not to discuss the nuclear situation in the primary approach; common projects and prosperity would end up building a bridge.



Dr. Béglé then listed the points on which the Swiss model can be an inspiration for Korea:

- Its democracy, beyond just elections, goes all the way to asking the opinion of all nationals on matters both trivial and very serious, after holding debates to foster people’s personal opinions. The last word is not that of the parliament or government but of the people.
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- Its decentralization. He gave as an example that there is no national ministry of education; instead, the authority is delegated to the 26 cantons, thus conferring autonomy on each region.
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- Its principle of “rule and disappear,” or modesty—which he said is not in the Korean DNA and is very difficult to learn.
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Finally, he expressed his personal opinion that the problem of the two Koreas is not hatred of each other but the fact of being “hostages of the worldwide fight” and “a buffer between the mighty” in the middle of the U.S.-China conflict.

Dr. Béglé said that he became pessimistic with the increasing hostility of the superpowers, and he didn’t believe the unification of Korea would bring peace in Northeast Asia, as Korea is not the cause but the victim. He hoped for pacification between the main protagonists, US-China-Russia, and advised the two Koreas not to fight with each other as their interests lie in waiting for “the masters to calm down.”

The conference ended with questions from the audience, both in the UPF office and online. It all led to an increased awareness that we all can contribute in some way, in our respective organizations, to peace on the Korean Peninsula, in Northeast Asia and in the world.

To see a video of the proceedings, [click here](#).