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PEACE and the Reunification of KOREA

Policy Statement

Adopted by the NCC Governing Board
November 6, 1986

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

About NCC Policy Statements

A policy statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. expresses the Council's basic position with respect to Christian principles and their general application to today's society and world. The 260-member Governing Board, made up of delegations representing the NCC's 32 member communions, is the only body that can approve such statements.

Developed through an extended study process that generally culminates with readings at two successive Governing Board meetings, a policy statement:

- guides the work of the Council,
- is commended to member churches for their consideration, and
- helps influence public opinion.

Policy statements have a wide scope and form the basis for resolutions addressing current and more specific situations facing church and society.

The Korean people, whether they live in South Korea (Republic of Korea/R.O.K.) or North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea/D.P.R.K.), desire to restore the unity that was theirs for more than a thousand years before the end of World War II. In 1945 the nation was divided, its people separated into two increasingly hostile and heavily armed states, their enmity sparked and sustained by the global confrontation of the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The churches and the government of the United States must hear the plea of the Korean people for reunification, and so revise attitudes and policies as to free them to pursue their national unity without external impediment. Several powers were and continue to be involved in creating and maintaining the division of Korea. But the government of the United States took the initiative in 1945 which led to the division. Furthermore our nation is the only foreign country which still retains an armed military presence on the peninsula. Therefore we must assume today particular responsibilities for assisting all Koreans who strive to overcome division by peaceful means.

As Christians we regard the need to overcome division not primarily from diplomatic or military perspectives, but rather from the side of a suffering, divided people whose pain we are coming to

know well: we confess that we share responsibility for their plight and for this we are truly sorry.

The Christian Ministry of Healing, Reconciliation and Hope

As we state the policy of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. on the question of the reunification of Korea, and make recommendations to the member communions and to our government, we reaffirm these truths: God the Creator is one, and all human beings are God's children, co-responsible for the integrity of Creation. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all humankind. The Holy Spirit seeks to draw all people into one and inspires all people to show forth the fruits of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit also seeks to bind the Church into a single body as a sign of God's desire that all people be one. These fundamental affirmations of our faith are the basis of our Christian sensitivity to the suffering which separation and division inflict upon people and the Church. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried, but rose again that we might be reconciled to one another and with God. This same Christ who blesses the peacemakers and calls us to the ministry of healing and reconciliation gives us hope that division can be overcome, even against the greatest odds.

The Threat of Division to World Peace

The division of Korea has had consequences which go far beyond the peninsula. It led to one of the most destructive wars in history between 1950 and 1953. It contributed to the deepening of the ideological cleft of the Cold War which has ever since locked the two major power blocks in potentially mortal conflict. It has been the focus of instability and conflict in the North East Asia region. It has provided justification for raising two of the world's largest standing armies which today, thirty-three years after the Armistice, continue to confront one another across a tense Demarcation Line near the 38th parallel. With the additional presence of a large number of U.S. troops and with the stationing or targeting of nuclear weapons on Korean soil, this line which divides Korea has become one of the world's most dangerous places. Along this global fault line the abrasive edges of the two great ideological systems grind against one another. Thus it is one of the main "hot spots" on the globe where an accident, a miscalculation, or a foolish gesture by one or the other side could trigger a devastating regional conflict or even a global, nuclear war.

New Signs of Hope

By the grace of God this division need not be permanent; this people can have its unity restored. But that will require the sustained love, concern and dedicated work of people in many parts of the world in support of the efforts of the Korean people themselves in both North and South. After numerous frustrated attempts to achieve national reunification, many Koreans have felt powerless to make any progress toward the goal shared both in South and in North. In lesser measure, we too have felt this frustration and sense of powerlessness.

On July 4, 1972, the governments of North and South issued an important "Joint Communiqué on Peaceful Reunification." There they agreed on three basic principles:

- unification shall be achieved through independent Korean efforts without external imposition or interference;
- unification shall be achieved by peaceful means;
- as a homogeneous people, a great national unity shall be sought above all, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems.

While the "Joint Communiqué" produced few tangible results, both sides continue to affirm those principles.

Since early 1984, however, there have been some encouraging new openings. There have been renewed official contacts between North and South Korea, the provision and acceptance of emergency assistance by the North to flood victims in the South, followed by official conversations regarding economic and humanitarian issues, culminating in the first exchange of visits between separated family members in North and South since the Korean War.

We see signs of hope for Korea which we, as Christians, believe are the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a moment, we believe, of *kairos*, a welcome, propitious, critical time to support our sisters and brothers in the whole of Korea as they seek to take their destiny in hand. This is a time for decisive commitment by the churches to help build a climate in North East Asia which would be conducive to pursuing those new opportunities. The biblical word *kairos* connotes an opportune time like that of harvest, a time for repentance and action.

Contributing to a World-Wide Ecumenical Endeavour

New initiatives have also been taken among the churches. South Korean churches identified reunification as a priority concern in early 1984, asserting their right and responsibility, as well as that of the people at large, to participate in the national discussion on reunification. A Unification Study Committee has been created by the National Council of Churches in Korea to this end. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches convened a consultation in the Fall of 1984 at Tozanso, Japan, on "Peace and Justice in North East Asia: Prospects for Peaceful Resolution of Conflict," which focused on Korean reunification with full knowledge of the two Korean governments. While recognizing that reunification is to be achieved by Koreans themselves, a major international ecumenical endeavour is seeking to mobilize support and establish favorable conditions for the Korean effort.

The NCCCUSA responded to this initiative by sponsoring the North American Ecumenical Conference on the Unification of Korea in December 1985, in cooperation with Canadian churches. As had been the case with the WCC consultation, this Conference was preceded by contacts with the two Korean governments. It was followed by intensive discussions between the NCCCUSA and representatives of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regarding possible visits to their countries. Both sides agreed to this, and dialogue and consultation with church and government leaders took place in North and South Korea in April and May 1986.

A Focus of Tension and Conflict

Throughout their long history, the Korean people have been blessed with cultural, linguistic and ethnic unity, and a beautiful land, rich in resources and in productive agricultural areas which for millennia have been sufficient to support its population. The land is small, roughly the size of the state of Minnesota. An estimated sixty million persons live there, one-third north, two-thirds south of the Demarcation Line.

Korea has never posed a threat to its powerful neighbours: China, Russia (the present-day Soviet Union), or Japan. But its key strategic position bridging Asia and the Pacific made these oft-aggressive powers anxious to dominate the peninsula. Japan's main islands are located a scant 120 miles to the southeast. About the same distance to the west lies China's Shantung Peninsula. Korea shares its northern border for about 150 miles with China, and for eleven miles in the northeast with the U.S.S.R. Seventy-five miles further north is Vladivostok, one of the Soviet Union's principal naval bases, and a vital outlet to the Pacific.

Korea has for ages been a focus of contention among North East Asian powers eager to shore up their strategic defenses or to have a base from which to launch attacks against others. It is not surprising therefore that when the United States pursued its "Manifest Destiny" into Asia and the Pacific in the late nineteenth century, it also viewed Korea as a pawn to be conquered, controlled, neutralized, or traded in order to attain or preserve control over other territories. In the 1905 Taft-Katsura Agreement, for example, the U.S. secretly accepted Japan's ambitions regarding Korea on condition that the U.S. would have a free hand in the Philippines.

For centuries, Korea has been a barometer of the political climate of its region. Since 1945 it has become an indicator of the state of peace and security in the world. It was over control of this land that the Cold War produced its first hot regional war which claimed about four million casualties. Since then the "Korean conflict" has time and again reverberated beyond the borders of the peninsula and of the region. Across the Demilitarized Zone today are faced off, at the ready, two of the world's largest standing armies, each backed by super-power military forces which in case of any major contingency would almost certainly get involved directly or indirectly. The South's armed forces plus 40,000 U.S. troops are under direct U.S. command in the R.O.K.-U.S. Combined Forces Command, and are equipped with sophisticated weaponry. U.S. nuclear arms, the U.S. Pacific Fleet and U.S. bases in Japan, as well as logistic support from Japan's Self Defense Forces, strengthen the South's military posture. Current U.S. policy is to exert strong pressure on Japan to extend the scope of its regional military role. The North's armed forces, of a size comparable to the South's despite its smaller population, are neighbored directly by Chinese and Soviet allies with nuclear weapons based nearby in the eastern part of the Soviet Union. Frequent military incidents along the Demarcation Line between tense military forces on both sides threaten to explode into broader warfare.

Conflict and Division

Such conflict is not new for Koreans. Throughout its 2,500 years of recorded history, this land has

been trampled by armies pursuing conquest, subjugated by foreign powers, forced into unwilled alliances, occupied and humiliated. Despite this, for thirteen centuries before 1945, neither the land nor the people of Korea were ever divided. Therein lies both the tragedy of division and the hope that it can be overcome. People so bound together, over millenia do not easily forget their common ancestry, history, tradition, language and culture, nor readily accept the division of their nation and land.

The annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910 marked the beginning of one of the cruelest periods in Korean history. The entire productive force of the nation was put at the service of the Japanese empire and the people reduced to virtual slaves in their own land. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans were taken as laborers to Japan. In the last stages, systematic attempts were made to erase the very memory of Korean language, culture and history, and Koreans were even forced to take Japanese names. The Koreans resisted foreign rule. In 1919 and again in 1929 there were major popular revolts which were brutally suppressed. From 1930 the courageous resistance against the Japanese moved underground and fought until Japan's surrender. The division of Korea in 1945 was not willed by Koreans. Liberation from Japanese Imperial rule on August 15, 1945 was greeted by people across the broadest political spectrum as the opportunity for which they had long struggled to restore Korea to Koreans and to establish a unified national government without external interference. But liberation and independence were fleeting. The United States, fearing that the Soviet Union would move to establish itself on the whole of the peninsula at the conclusion of World War II, proposed to the USSR that Korea be split temporarily along the 38th parallel until the surrender of Japanese forces was completed and the people could be prepared to govern their own affairs. The Soviet Union promptly agreed.

In the turbulent period following the division of the country, competing political forces moved to consolidate their power. The division was formalized through a United Nations plebiscite held only in the south which was under direct U.S. military rule. This resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Korea in Seoul on August 15, 1948, under the leadership of Syngman Rhee. Almost immediately, on September 9, 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was inaugurated in Pyongyang headed by Kim Il Sung and backed by the Soviet Union. Both claimed sovereignty over the entire peninsula.

Thus hopes that the division would rapidly give way to a reunified country were dashed, and tensions grew, culminating in the terrible Korean War between 1950 and 1953. It wreaked destruction hardly equalled in even the worst battles in Europe a decade earlier and left a heritage of bitterness and enmity still vivid more than a generation later. More bombs were dropped during this war than in the whole European Theater during World War II. Between 2-3,000,000 civilians were killed, wounded or reported missing. There were 1,000,000 Chinese casualties. Some 34,000 Americans lost their lives in those battles, too, along with 1,300 persons of other nations which contributed to the U.N. forces. By the end of the war, the families of some 10,000,000 Koreans were divided.

Such wounds heal very slowly, both in Korea and in our own nation. Their pain continues, and the scars remain.

At the end of the War, Koreans' hopes momentarily surged again. An Armistice Agreement was signed between the military commanders of the D.P.R.K. and the U.S.A. (representing the United Nations forces) according to which, "the military commanders of both sides (recommended) to the governments of the countries concerned on both sides that, within three months... a political conference of a higher level... be held... to settle through negotiation the question of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, etc." Tragically, decades later all these issues have yet to be resolved.

Christian Witness and Reconciliation

Christianity was first brought to Korea from China by Korean Catholics more than 200 years ago. When American Protestant churches dispatched their first missionaries to Korea over a century ago, Korean Protestant lay evangelists were already there witnessing to the faith. A Russian Orthodox Mission began in 1910. The Gospel took deep root among the people of the peninsula, especially the poor, the sick and the exploited. During the period of oppression under the Japanese, Christians participated, sometimes in leading roles, in the people's struggles for independence and justice.

After liberation from the Japanese, Korean Christians soon experienced the pain of division very intensely. Many fled from the North after 1945, especially during the Korean War years. In the midst of the ruins and the desperate conditions of tens of thousands of refugees uprooted by war, Christian communities in the South carried on a remarkable ministry of caring among the victims. They rebuilt churches, schools, hospitals and social centers, with the help of churches in the United States and worldwide.

In recent decades the churches in the South have become among the fastest growing in the world. Many Christians have also become known for their courageous defense of human rights and democracy. Personal and formal relations have matured between South Korean and American Christians at many levels. Among them has been a series of consultations involving the National Council of Churches in Korea, the NCCCUSA, and the Canadian Council of Churches.

Pyeongyang, now the capital of the North, was called the "Jerusalem" of Korean Christianity, and was the center from which the Good News spread throughout the country. However, after liberation from the Japanese, the Church in the North was decimated by social upheaval and war. Many Christians left because of the fear of life in a Communist society; thousands were killed by the violent tactics employed during the Korean War, especially the saturation bombing; among those who stayed, the experience of the participation of Christians in the war against them spread disillusionment; and many Christians left the Church under the pressure of a rigorously organized society. Christians in the North lost contact with each other, with those in the South and with churches around the world. After more than three decades of isolated existence during which the Korean Christians Federation in

the D.P.R.K. became more active, they have begun to be in touch again with churches abroad, beginning with those in the socialist countries of Europe. A few American Christians have visited the North in recent years, met Christians associated with the Korean Christians Federation, and participated in Sunday worship with several house church groups. We still have much to learn from and about North Korean Christians. What is certain is that God has not left this people without witnesses.

Believing, furthermore, that through Christ, God renewed the Covenant, calling all people to join in the work of the Creation, we strongly affirm the Korean people as subjects of their own history, responsible for and capable of reunifying their nation. Efforts to achieve participatory democracy and self-determination for the whole Korean people are an essential aspect of this responsibility for history. There is a deep will among Christians on both sides, despite the profound differences between their societies and between them as a result of decades of separation, to contribute jointly to finding ways to achieve national reconciliation, justice, independence and peaceful reunification.

History shows that for unification to be achieved peacefully and with justice for all Koreans, and for it to be lasting, a climate must be created in the region and in the world which will allow Koreans to approach their responsibility without external pressures or constraints. Christians in the various countries involved directly with Korea — Japan, China, the U.S.S.R., and the U.S.A. chief among them — must each play a supportive and nurturing role if Koreans are to succeed in achieving their common aspirations.

Christian Responsibility in the United States

The situation of Korea is a sharp reminder to Christians in the United States of our own divisions and of the consequences of our failures, as citizens of a powerful nation, to be more devoted to those things which make for peace. We are deeply conscious of the roles our nation's government, and military and economic interests have played in creating, maintaining and deepening the division of Korea. We need to help Americans become especially aware of this and of the consequences of our nation's political, economic and military domination of South Korea.

The churches too have much to confess. Korea has suffered from the uncritical acceptance by many in our churches and nation of the virulent anti-communism which gripped our society hard in the 1950s and has kept it in its grasp to varying degrees ever since. Many Christians not only acquiesced to the division of Korea after World War II, but provided theological and ideological justification for it. Churches of this nation have too often allowed fear of societies different from our own to overshadow our vocation to be reconcilers. We have been too quick to judge the faith of Christians in North Korea from whom we have long been separated by political division, and whose witness to the faith we did not know. Nor have we sought sufficiently to comprehend the witness to the Gospel of the South Korean churches in their society, or to respond adequately to their call to us to be more responsible as U.S. Christians in relation to Korea.

ADVOCACY AND ACTION

In a spirit of repentance, and with the desire to promote the cause of peace and reunification of Korea, the Governing Board of the NCCCUSA sets

forth the following guidelines for the advocacy and action of the Council and its member communions to avoid the repetition of the sins of the past and to heal the brokenness to which we have contributed:

Healing and Reconciliation

A. Recognizing that to contribute to the reunification of Korea we must work to eliminate from our own nation the fear and enmity toward others which are fed by the misuses and misunderstandings of national security and which blur our vision of the humanity of others, all of which make it difficult for us to learn from the mistakes of the past and to play a positive international role;

the NCCCUSA shall renew its own efforts and promote efforts in the member communions to eradicate these dehumanizing elements in our own national life.

B. Recognizing the need to develop a fuller understanding of the tragic consequences of the division of Korea;

the NCCCUSA shall continue to study the causes of conflict and division in Korea and develop concrete programs to assist in the healing of those wounds.

C. Recognizing the urgent need to assist divided families to be reunited with their loved ones while this generation is still alive;

the NCCCUSA will advocate and facilitate efforts to establish contact among and to reunite separated family members.

D. Giving thanks to God for the continued deepening of our bond of unity with churches and Christians in South Korea, and for guiding us over the barriers which so long have separated us from Christians in North Korea; and deeply regretting that Christians in South and North Korea have not yet been able to establish open and regular contact and to realize their unity;

1. *the NCCCUSA shall support and participate in the efforts of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in cooperation with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) to enable the Christians of North and South Korea to reestablish relations and to nurture one another in order better to serve all the people of Korea;*

2. *the NCCCUSA commends to the member communions the recommendations of the WCC 1984 Consultation on "Peace and Justice in North East Asia," and with regard to future U.S. contacts with North Korea, draws particular attention to the following: "Christians in North America and Europe have had only sporadic contacts with North Korea and have had extremely limited exposure to the Christian community there. Strengthening such ties of communication is an important first step. . . (But) renewing contact after such a long time requires careful preparation, coordination and consultation, taking into account the sensitivities of the churches in both parts of Korea. . . (It) is preferable that responsible church bodies be involved in these contacts. . . The churches (are) encouraged to share with the WCC and the CCA plans for contacts with and results of visits to North Korea."*

3. *The NCCCUSA further urges member communions to coordinate their activities in this field through its appropriate program units.*

Peace with Justice

A. *The NCCCUSA calls upon member communions* to enhance their current peace education programs through a focus on Korea, including the concerns expressed in this statement.

B. Recognizing that the barriers of decades of division and hostility can only be overcome through the full, open participation of the Korean people, North and South, in the process of reunification, not merely through negotiation at high levels of government;

the NCCCUSA shall continue and strengthen its efforts to promote peace, justice and participatory democracy for all Koreans as a fundamental aspect of reunification.

C. Considering that efforts are urgently needed to reduce tension in the North East Asia region to prevent a renewed outbreak of war and to create a climate favorable for reunification so that the Korean people may proceed to resolve their national question without undue external pressure or interference,

the NCCCUSA shall:

1. *Continue to press for* progress in direct negotiations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in order to reduce tensions between the two superpowers whose bilateral relations directly affect the political climate of the world and of this region; and recognizing that other major powers in this area can play a constructive role in helping to create a positive climate conducive for such talks, *urge* the U.S. government to be sensitive to their special interests and relationships in the peninsula.

2. *Urge* the United States Government to refrain from applying pressures on Japan to assume a regional military role, especially in the light of its history of military conquest and colonial rule on the peninsula, and out of respect for the efforts of the Japanese people to safeguard Article 9 of their Constitution, which renounces war as a means of settling international disputes; and to encourage the government of Japan to open more adequate channels of communication with the D.P.R.K.

3. *Press for* the negotiated withdrawal of all U.S. nuclear weapons in, and all U.S. and U.S.S.R. nuclear weapons targeted on Korea; and *press for* the creation of a nuclear-free zone in North East Asia.

4. *Call for* a suspension or substantial reduction in scale of military exercises in both sides of Korea and their eventual cessation as a way of eliminating gestures which may be interpreted as provocative.

5. *Call for* a mutually balanced reduction of the military forces of both the D.P.R.K. and the R.O.K., and a commitment by all parties not to introduce new levels of weaponry into the peninsula in order to enhance peace and security and to allow for a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea.

New Directions for U.S. Policy

A. *The NCCCUSA calls upon* the United States Government to affirm formally that it is a policy goal of the United States to support the peaceful reunification of Korea.

B. Believing the time has come for the United States Government to develop relationships with North Korea while at the same time reassuring South Korea that the U.S. will continue and enhance those relations with it which promote and respect

the full sovereignty of the Korean people; and believing that such steps are possible now, and could be taken in such a way as to reduce tension and fear, to create new stability in the region and to serve the cause of the reunification of Korea: *the NCCCUSA urges* the United States Government:

1. *to refrain from* hostile and inflammatory rhetoric about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with the hope that this would reduce the use of hostile and inflammatory rhetoric by both parties in Korea.

2. *To end* restrictions on direct people-to-people contacts between the D.P.R.K. and the U.S.A., and to enable increased contacts between church, cultural and academic sectors of the two societies.

3. *To help facilitate* contact and reunion of Koreans resident in the U.S.A. with separated family members in the D.P.R.K.

4. *To create* a U.S. interests section in a friendly neutral nation's embassy in Pyongyang and to invite an equivalent D.P.R.K. representation in Washington, with the hope that this would lead to similar steps between the R.O.K. and the D.P.R.K.

5. *To help facilitate* similar channels of communication between the R.O.K. and the People's Republic of China and the U.S.S.R. in recognition of the important roles these nations play in the region and their present-day potential for contributing to reunification.

C. Believing that the reunification of Korea can only occur as a result of direct talks between North and South Korea;

the NCCCUSA urges the United States to extricate itself from its commanding role in R.O.K. military affairs and its dominance over the political and economic life of the nation in order to achieve a climate in which productive talks could take place on the basis of mutual respect for the independence of the other.

D. Believing that the membership of both the R.O.K. and the D.P.R.K. in many of the specialized agencies of the United Nations is an important beginning toward full Korean participation; and that the U.N. could play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue between North and South Korea on issues regarding reunification, and in helping to develop confidence-building measures which could be taken as intermediate steps on the way to reunifying the country; but that this constructive role cannot be played by the United Nations so long as it is considered by more than one of the parties directly or indirectly involved as a partisan force;

the NCCCUSA urges the United States to withdraw from commanding the U.N. peace-keeping operation at the Demilitarized Zone in Korea in favor of mutually acceptable neutral nations, in order to free that world body more adequately to fulfill its current mandate and explore appropriate alternative roles.

E. Believing that now, more than three decades after the end of open hostilities in Korea and the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1953, the time to end the war and to make peace is overdue;

the NCCCUSA urges the United States Government to initiate negotiations to end the war and bring about a comprehensive peace settlement in Korea as a step toward the reunification of the peninsula.