

The NCCK's 100th Anniversary International Conference
“God of Life, Renew All Creation in Your Love” (PS 104:30, JN 6:39 REV 21:5)
A Renewed Centennial for Life, Peace and Hope

September 20-22, 2024, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Friday 20th September, 16:00 – 17:30

Panel Presentation 1 (Intergenerational Talk) “Reflection on 50 years, People to People’s Solidarity towards Peace on the Korean Peninsula” – by Detlev Knoche

(Chair, Evangelical Mission in Solidarity – EMS, Ecumenical Liaison Officer of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau [EKHN] and Director of the Ecumenical Center of EKHN and EKKW [Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck]).

Respected General Secretary of NCCK, Rev. Kim Jong Seng,
respected General Secretary of the WCC, Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay,
respected General Secretary of the CCA, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara,
dear representatives of the NCCK Member Churches,
dear international delegates and participants of the NCCK’s 100th Anniversary International Conference,
dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

First, I would like to express my deep thanks to you in the National Council of Churches in Korea for your invitation not only to be part of this important ecumenical consultation on the one hundredth anniversary of the National Council of Churches in Korea but also for the invitation to take part in this panel presentation today. I’m deeply honored, and I enjoy it to do that together with Rev. Shin Seung Min. A long friend- and companionship binds us together. We served together as ecumenical officers of our churches in EMS and my church always supported his ideas and projects for peace on the Korean peninsula!



(Consultation of NCCK-KCF-EKD-EKHN in Arnoldshain February 2008 – photo D.Knoche)

Talking about People to People’s Solidarity towards Peace on the Korean Peninsula I can’t start my presentation without remembering a good old friend which is well-known to all of us – Lutz Drescher. He passed away in the beginning of this year. He had very close biographical ties with Korea and since his years as liaison officer at EMS we developed a very close relationship which turned over the years into a deep friendship. I learnt a lot from him and he – for sure – encouraged people in the EMS fellowship, in my Church EKHN and in our

partnership relations with PROK and especially with the Gwangju Presbytery to focus on People to People's Solidarity towards Peace on the Korean Peninsula. Until the end of his life, he was closely connected with people who were and still are passionate about democracy, peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula.

Let me continue with some personal remark. My relationship to Korea and to our partners in PROK started more than 20 years back. From the beginning we had three main topics: democracy – human rights – peace on the Korean Peninsula – Reunification and the experiences in Germany after the 9th of November 1989 when the wall between East and West Germany came down.

I was born in West Germany in October 1958. I was not quite three years old when the Wall between West and East Germany was erected in 1961. I grew up in a family that only had very distant relatives in the former GDR, but never had any relations with them or other people in East Germany. From the very beginning, my parents were advocates of Willi Brandt's so called "Ostpolitik", a policy aimed at reconciliation and rapprochement. In the final consequence, they would also have been prepared to recognize the former GDR as an independent state - a position that was tantamount to treason, especially for conservatives. That was the spirit in which I grew up. Hopes for reunification never shaped my biography. It wasn't an issue, not even among us young people, and at school it was only mentioned in passing. For me and my generation, it was a complete surprise when, after the peaceful revolution in the GDR on November 9, 1989, the Wall came down and reunification began.

It was only in our partnership with the PROK and in the encounters with you brothers and sisters in Korea through the World Council of Churches, the EMS and the EKD that I encountered this deep longing for peace and reunification - also on the Korean peninsula. Alongside the other topics I have already mentioned - democracy and human rights - it has deeply influenced my commitment to the partnership.

As the EKHN's Asia Secretary and later as the Director of the Ecumenical Center, I was involved in organizing events, meetings, consultations and solidarity campaigns and as part of your commitment as Korean Churches to peace, we promoted particularly encounters between Christians from North and South Korea. The church convention (Kirchentag) in Germany first opened spaces for that and during a Consultation in Seoul in 2001, it was decided to hold a joint consultation with representatives of the North Korean Christian Federation KCF. At the end of the visit of a delegation of the EKHN church board to Korea in September 2001, it was stated: *"The EKHN wants to strengthen the church's reconciliation work between North and South Korea by supporting the EKD's plans - possibly organizing the next consultation together - and through its own activities. It will examine whether it can establish relations with Christians in North Korea."*

This special commitment found its first expression in the hosting and support of the EKHN for the "International Church Consultation on the Role of the Churches in the Peaceful Reunification Process on the Korean Peninsula", which took place from March 11 to 15, 2004 in the Evangelical Academy Arnoldshain. Delegations from the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKC) and the North Korean Christian Council (KCC) met with representatives of the German churches and mission organizations, the Korean Church Convention in Germany and individual representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the Conference of Christian Churches in Asia (CCA), the national church councils of Japan and the USA as well as Protestant churches from Canada and Switzerland. During this consultation, I learned that we Germans can play a role as partners in solidarity and criticism in our Korean brothers' and sisters' search for ways of reunification,

based on the unifying historical experience of (having been) divided. And for you, dear brothers and sisters and the people here in Korea - in the South and in the North - it remains important to this day that we remember how painful their division still is and do not stop praying for them and accompanying them on their path to a just peace.

This was the beginning of a phase for EKHN which was and is formative for our ecumenical profile and the relationship with our partner church, the PROK. Just one year later 2005, we hosted a small delegation from North Korea and our PROK partner Presbytery in Gwangju. The occasion was the Frankfurt International Book Fair where Korea was the guest of honor, and the days together stood according to Verse 1 of Psalm 133 under the biblical motto "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."

The accompanying program of the International Book Fair focused on the event series "HAN - North and South Korea as guests in the Protestant Church". Talking and sharing about the experiences, hopes and aspirations of people on the Korean peninsula that was the central focus. Gaining an insight into culture and Christian life in both parts of Korea and into Korean life in Frankfurt. Despite all the differences in the socio-political framework conditions, it became obvious that Christians in North and South Korea and in the Rhine-Main region are united in their political responsibility as Christians in their respective living environments and in their hope for a reunited Korea!

As part of this program, there was also a historical encounter and dialogue between the Korean poet KIM Chi-Ha and the theologian Jürgen Moltmann. The poet KIM Chi Ha was one of the leading figures of the democracy movement and was one of the most radical opponents of the military regime in the 1970s. His political satire "The Five Bandits" landed him in prison in 1970 and later to the death row. Worldwide solidarity – including that of the theologian Jürgen Moltmann – ensured that he was finally released in 1980.

With his "Theology of Hope" Jürgen Moltmann encouraged many committed young theologians in their civic engagement and also strengthened you, our Korean brothers and sisters, in your resistance against the military dictatorship. Moltmann had a special relationship with Korea. In 1982, he published the central texts of Minjung theology, "*Minjung. Theology of the People of God in South Korea*".

What made the evening particularly exciting was that although both authors knew about each other and had referred to each other in their thinking on several occasions, but they had never met in person until that day. Jürgen Moltmann passed away in June (03.06.2024) of this year at an advanced age. In our obituaries, his relationship with Korea was once again particularly honored. KIM Chi-Ha passed away in May 2022 (08.05.2022).

In 2008, we again hosted an important International Consultation in Arnoldshain on "Peace, Unification and Social Development - Models for the Future on the Korean Peninsula". At this conference, we were able to bring together stakeholders who work with the DPRK in various areas: In politics, in culture, in science and in development cooperation. Seeing what is possible and how much cooperation has already taken place was a revelation for everyone from Korea and for the delegates from churches around the world. Of course, this has changed significantly for the worse in the current political situation. But we have a reminder of what was possible, and we can carry the hope that it can be possible again.

After the consultation, a meeting of the "Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula" (EFK) took place. The North Koreans were unable to attend the founding meeting in Hong Kong in 2006. The 2008 meeting gave them the opportunity to help finalize the plans for an Ecumenical Forum. Delegates from all

In Germany, and especially in the EKHN, this would not be possible without the close cooperation and support of Korean Christians and the Korean Congregation Rhine-Main. For many years now, they are inviting us to a solidarity concert for the people in the DPRK during Advent. Korean and German musicians present a high-quality musical program on this evening. Among other things, the proceeds were used to buy wheat for a bread and noodle factory in Pyongyang.



(Unveiling the statue remembering the “comfort Women” 2020 in Frankfurt – photo D.Knoche)

It was the courage of the Korean congregation and the Protestant Church in Frankfurt that made it possible to publicly erect the peace statue commemorating the fate of the “Comfort Women” (women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied countries and territories before and during World War II) in 2020. On 8th of March – International Women’s Day – the Peace Statue was unveiled and presented to the public by the deputy church president Rev. Ulrike Scherf. The statue stands for the suffering of people around the world who have been and still are exposed to sexualized violence in wars. It admonishes the rights of women in war situations. On the base of the peace statue is written:

„Hundreds of thousands of girls and women were sexually enslaved by the Japanese military in the Asia-Pacific region from 1931 to 1945 as so-called ‚comfort women‘. The Peace Statue commemorates the inhuman suffering resulting from these war crimes. Courageous women broke the silence and publicly stood up for the recognition of their rights and dignity. The Statue of Peace for the victims of sexualized violence all over the world calls upon us to work for the protection of all people from violence.“

Coming to an end: over the 50 years times have changed again and again, but reconciliation and reunification on the Korean peninsula are more burning than ever and stability and peace in this region are highly endangered. At present it needs a lot of hope, prayers and convincing work for a peaceful future of the Korean peninsula! And it is important to pass this hope on to the next generation, the young people in Korea. The great Theologian Jürgen Moltmann thought us: “Hope is the bread of life!”

Thank you very much for your attention.