

Towards a Peace Treaty on the Korean Peninsula

International Symposium

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On Friday, July 26th 2013, the ISC team participated in the International Symposium on Concluding a Peace Treaty on the Korean Peninsula held at the Seoul Women's Plaza, organized by the People's Movement for Opposing War and Achieving Peace. The conference was attended by a number of scholars, journalists, politicians and activists from Korea, Canada, Japan, the United States and China, as well as a number of veterans of the Korean peace movement, some of whom had spent over 30 years as political prisoners.

✖ The conference addressed key issues on the topic of peace on the Peninsula and reunification of the two Koreas. Speakers investigated the "threat" of North Korea, obstacles to peace (including United States militarism and imperialism, state nationalism, and the relationships between the countries of Northeast Asia) and recommendations for peace (including reunification, normalization of relations between the two Koreas, denuclearization of Northeast Asia, and independence from the United States).

The special session, "US Hegemony and the Globalization of War" was presented by Michel Chossudovsky, a professor at Ottawa University, an international authority on anti-globalization issues and leader in the pro-peace movement. His talk focused on the role of the US in blocking peace on the Korean Peninsula, arguing that the US has formed a neo-colonial relationship with South Korea through direct military control and indirect political control. He argued that the US-ROK alliance is not an alliance at all, rather, South Korea is under US military occupation. On the issue of denuclearization, Chossudovsky questioned "who the real threat is" to peace.

✖ He examined this in the context of North Korea's relationship to the US, and concluded that the real threat is the US, who is unwilling to show any sort of reciprocity on the issue of nuclear disarmament. Faced with a hostile policy from the US — the number one global nuclear power with over 2000 deployed nuclear weapons currently targeted at various countries— Chossudovsky claimed that North Korea has good reason *not* to want to denuclearize, and that the US must take the first steps to denuclearization of the peninsula. Thus, an integral part of realizing peace on the Peninsula involves significant action on the part of the United States in ending its hostile policies and asymmetrical standpoint on the issue of nuclear disarmament toward North Korea.

Chossudovsky further concluded that peace talks must encompass a repeal of the basic command structure of the military (in which the US military has de facto control of the Korean military), retreat of the 37,000 US troops in the South, and US nuclear disarmament—this would lead to military and economic liberation in the South and are preconditions for a peace treaty.

The speakers of the first session, “Ending the Armistice Agreement with a Peace Treaty in the Korean Peninsula”, included

✖ Gregory Elich, author and anti-war activist from the United States; Lei Xiong, Professor at Tsinghua University, Peking University, and Renmin University of China (People’s University of China); Ryoichi Hattori, Member of Japan’s House of Representatives (Social Democratic Party); Gyungsoon Park, South Korean author and Vice-president of the Progressive Policy Research Institute; and Ik-pyo Hong, Member of the Republic of Korea’s National Assembly (Democratic Unified Party). Speakers analyzed the inter-relatedness of the countries in Northeast Asia and argued that a precondition for peace on the Korean Peninsula included improved relations between China, Japan and Korea and a nuclear free East Asia.

For instance, Mr. Hattori spoke of the importance of a denuclearized Japan, stating that after World War 2, Japan reformed its constitution to give up wars and nuclear weapons forever. The Korean War, however, provided a reason for Japan to re-militarize and to be used as an anti-communist outpost for the US. Currently, the Abe government is seeking to repeal the anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons reforms and further re-militarize the country. He stated that no country can justify peace by militarism and that no peace can be achieved by the production of war machines, such as nuclear weapons. The re-nuclearization and re-militarization of Japan would thus be an obstacle to peace for the region. Speakers also investigated whether peace is possible without reunification, what the obstacles to this process include and how to best overcome them. Several speakers mentioned the value of creating a safe space for a grassroots path to peace pioneered by civic and citizens groups and the importance of protecting individual ideas from repression under the banners of nationalism and state.

The speakers of the second session, “Joint Action for Peace in Northeast Asia”, included Kenju Watanabe of Japan, President of the South Korea-Japan People’s Solidarity Network and permanent board member of the Japanese Committee for Asia-Africa People’s Solidarity; Tim Shorrock, an American author, journalist and member of the Working Group for Peace ✖

and De-militarization in Asia-Pacific Region; Jejun Joo, Policy Chair of the Korea Alliance of Progressive Movements; and Byong-ryul Min, member of Unified Progressive Party’s supreme council and founding member of the Democratic Labor Party. This session addressed how concerted actions can promote peace in the region. For example, Tim Shorrock noted the large-scale ignorance of the United States public on the issue of peace and re-unification *even among leading progressive groups*. He urged those in attendance to help each other educate Americans about the truth of Korean history and current affairs as they relate to peace and reunification *from a Korean perspective*. He labeled this as a precondition for peace, stating that the fanaticism constructed by the American media toward North Korea prevents popular support for the country and, in the minds of Americans, legitimizes United States military presence in the South, further securing the US geopolitical agenda in the region.

Increasing education would likely decrease the fanaticism directed towards the North among the American general public and would create international solidarity in Korea’s quest for peace and reunification. This session demonstrated that the task of establishing peace on the peninsula extends beyond the borders of Korea- it is an issue that affects the world over, especially one characterized by a globalized economy and increasing global relationships.

Peace in Korea and in Northeast Asia is a complicated issue involving many parties, many

conditions and many potential obstacles. It may not be an issue quickly resolved, but it is encouraging and hopeful to know that so many people are aligned in its recognition and are so tirelessly working for its realization. Conferences such as these are necessary steps in initiating and engaging in constructive dialogue targeted towards constructive goals. These dialogues, actions and initiatives help to build solidarity in the cause and are integral to peace and reunification in Korea

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