

UPF Canada Holds 5th Webinar: Viewing the DPRK from Within

Robert Duffy
February 23, 2023



Canada -- The fifth of UPF's signature series of webinars under the title "Viewing the DPRK from Within" was held with panelists speaking from three continents:

Mr. Felix Abt, Swiss business affairs specialist based in Vietnam, who lived for seven years in the DPRK and supported infrastructure development and modernization of a number of industries in that country;

Mr. Étienne Daoust, holder of an MBA from Hautes Études Commerciales and a Master of Science, Technology and Society from the University of Quebec in Montreal, for which his thesis focused on the use of new technologies in development and internal changes in the DPRK; and

Mr. Jacques Marion, current co-chair of UPF Europe and the Middle East, who has lived in Africa, China and Russia for over thirty years serving in a variety of humanitarian and educational capacities. He lives in Paris and travels widely throughout Eurasia and the Middle East.

Co-hosted by UPF-Canada and UPF-EUME, the program was introduced by **Robert Duffy**, secretary-general, UPF-Canada, and moderated by **Dr. Franco Famularo**, president, UPF-Canada. Overcoming technical difficulties is something of a headache in web-based meetings, and we had trouble hearing Mr. Abt through the internet. Consequently, Dr. Famularo read Mr. Abt's remarks while a solution was sought. the program was held February 23, 2023.

Mr. Abt noted the status of the conflict on the Korean Peninsula -- that 70 years after the war ended in stalemate, there is no more than a truce, not a peace agreement -- which leaves the peninsula in an ongoing and inconclusive political state of a people divided who are in fact one people, one family. Given the current state of economic sanctions, he said, it is impossible to engage in trade with the DPRK, and the only possible way to help is through humanitarian agencies which can operate within the country.

After a six-year hiatus, the Seoul government referred to North Korea as an enemy, which saddened Mr. Abt. He suggested that people with empathy, like the Unification Church people, with roots in both North and South Korea, convene some of the world's brightest minds to work on fresh solutions toward the resolution of the impasse.

After his remarks, he answered questions posed by audience members, such as, "How has your ability to do business in the DPRK been impacted by changes in its relations with the West?" He remarked that initially when he came to North Korea and for the first few years, it was difficult to break through the learning curve on both sides, and to gain the trust to experiment with new techniques and so on, but that ultimately it was very rewarding for all stakeholders including the authorities. He mentioned some examples: the mining equipment he introduced helped to improve efficiency while reducing the incidence of accidents and enhancing safety; the pharmaceutical company he oversaw achieved International Good Manufacturing Practices certification from the WHO, which gave the company access to markets where they competed successfully with international rivals.

Next, **Mr. Étienne Daoust** gave a PowerPoint presentation on "The Effects of Political Tensions on Tourists." He stressed key differences as a tourist between "normal," "near war," and "near peace" conditions as he experienced them on his study trips in the DPRK. He compared conditions at the border, and the situation in terms of local access restrictions, experience restrictions and local population reaction to tourists.

His perceptions were based on four different trips from July 2013 to September 2018, which purposely coincided with important national occasions in the DPRK, and are summarized on the chart below. Three of the occasions were the 60th anniversary of "Victory Day" – the victory over the UN/US forces in July 1953 that established North Korea; the 70th anniversary of "Liberation Day" – the end of World War II which ended the Japanese occupation; and September 2018 – the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Workers Party. The fourth trip brought Mr. Daoust to a trade fair in the city of Rason. The rarely visited Special Economic Zone of Rason, near the North Korean border with China and Russia, is a truly off-the-beaten path experience for most visitors to the DPRK.

Finally, **Mr. Jacques Marion** spoke of the fact that one doesn't often hear about the DPRK from the inside. However, UPF founders, Rev. and Dr. Moon, who were born and raised in the northern part of Korea, have spoken extensively about the tragedy of the war in Korea. He said that a prosperous future for Korea will not exist without reconciliation.

"Our founders," he said, "initiated this process of reconciliation by meeting Kim Il-sung in 1991." He went on to elaborate that last year, 2022, UPF held the 10-year anniversary of the founder's passing for which DPRK Chairman Kim Jong-un sent a large bouquet of flowers, and that Mrs. Moon has an ongoing invitation from the North. Mr. Marion stressed the importance of bringing world leaders to support this process and bring healing to the peninsula. He noted that it was the great powers who were fighting in Korea, not really Koreans themselves. The Koreans served as proxies for the great powers, and thus, the great powers must be involved in the healing of the peninsula.

It is for that reason, he said, that UPF holds big events such as the World Summit Conference last February 2022, held in Seoul, with many world leaders also participating online due to COVID. This conference, co-chaired by Ban Ki-moon, former secretary-general of the UN, and current Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia which has an historically special relationship with the DPRK due to King Sihanouk's friendship with DPRK founder, Kim Il-sung, closed by endorsing a resolution. It is called the "Seoul Resolution towards Sustainable Peace and Prosperity on the Korean Peninsula," and was endorsed by all the world leaders in attendance. One of its articles states: "We support the initiative of two states towards one nation, one peninsula, one people, one culture, promoting people to people ties and cultural assets and heritage to serve as a bridge of trust connecting the two Koreas."

Mr. Marion concluded his remarks by asking the other two panellists to comment on the prospects for reunification of the Koreas, especially with reference to the younger generation living in the DPRK. Mr. Daoust responded that reunification is unlikely in the short term with the government of ROK that is in place at this time. However, young people, especially in the DPRK, are being exposed to life outside their country due to the increase in cell phone use and the films and TV programs they can access which originate primarily in South Korea. They are generally in favor of reunification, especially since it is the official policy of the government.

Mr. Abt commented that many young people in the DPRK are interested in business, are business-minded and thus open to possibilities of doing business across the borders with China and other, more distant places.

Further questions and answers focused on the parallel economic systems operating in the country to serve different needs.

All in all, a very productive and informative session.