

# UN International Day of Peace: Focus on the Korean Peninsula

by Lance Gardiner

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“We can bring change in North Korea by enlightening the suffering masses – those who have nothing to lose”, stated Mr Kim, managing editor of the Free North Korea newspaper, which is published online in the UK. Addressing nearly 40 participants at a conference to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace held in Thornton Heath, South London, on 22 September 2012, Mr Kim gave a harrowing account of the desperate circumstances endured by the people of North Korea, where its citizens are conditioned by a cradle-to-grave education system to idolize the dynastic leadership, and where millions have died of starvation accepting without question the party line that the Americans were responsible for such a disaster. He exposed the tightly controlled pyramid structure of Korean society in which the party followed by the military are given complete priority over ordinary citizens, leading to a shocking contrast of obscene luxury for the privileged few while the rest lived in conditions of extreme poverty and near starvation.



Speaking through an able translator, Mr Kim pointed out the total lack of freedom in his native country, to watch TV, to sing songs, to practice religion, with communication being restricted to phone calls in monitored public phone boxes. He highlighted the harsh realities faced by North Korean refugees and defectors, exposed to human rights abuses particularly in China due to their illegal status, leaving their families behind to an uncertain fate at the hands of the authorities.

In an afternoon program designed to raise awareness of the troubled Korean Peninsula, one of the world's most significant geo-political flashpoints, two presentations described the initiatives of the Unification Movement and the late UPF founder, Father Moon, which aimed at establishing productive channels towards bringing peace, reconciliation and reunification to the divided peninsula. Mrs Tina Coombs, former European Vice-President of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), opened the proceedings with a slide presentation of the WFWP women's convention organised in North Korea held between counterparts from the North and South in 2007. With poignant ceremonies of reconciliation, the convention aimed to build bridges of trust and friendship between the women of the divided land. The exceptional beauty of the Kumgang

Mountains in North Korea depicted in her presentation also illustrated the rich tourism potential of North Korea in a future era of peaceful cooperation. In the final presentation, Mr Ashley Crossthwaite, UK director of the International Relief Friendship Foundation (IRFF), explained the background between the extraordinary summit in 1991 between Father Moon and North Korean President Kim Il Sung, which led to several concrete initiatives that helped to defuse tension on the Korean Peninsula and also to joint business ventures as a practical means to bring reconciliation. The proceedings were concluded by a question and answer session between the audience and presenters in which the dialogue covered how information could be effectively disseminated to the people of North Korea, and other means of supporting progressive change there.

Finally, as part of the program, an Ambassador for Peace Award was presented to Carmen Munroe OBE, a well-known Guyanese-born British actress, for her valuable contributions to theatre and charitable activities assisting African villages.