

## Kim Jong Il's Death Prompts Unificationists To Sound Notes of Caution

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December 19, 2011



*Kim Jong Il's youngest son, Kim Jong Un (black suit), rises to power as the successor to his late father (right).*

Unificationist observers of North Korean political affairs expressed concern and some cautious optimism about the future of the Korean peninsula following the announcement Sunday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has died of heart failure at the age of 69 on December 17, 2011. The death was acknowledged by North Korean authorities on Dec. 19, 2011.

“Kim is believed to have suffered a stroke in 2008, but he had appeared relatively vigorous in photos and video from recent trips to China and Russia and in numerous trips around the country carefully documented by state media. The communist country's 'Dear Leader' - reputed to have had a taste for cigars, cognac and gourmet cuisine - was believed to have had diabetes and heart disease,” the Associated Press reported.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the state news agency of North Korea, reported that Kim Jong Il had “passed away from a great mental and physical strain at 08:30 December 17, 2011, on train during a field guidance tour.”

“Kim Jong Il always thought highly of True Father, since the latter's 1991 visit. Every year he would send a precious birthday gift to True Parents,” wrote Dr. Mark P. Barry, an adjunct professor at the Unification Theological Seminary and advisor to the Universal Peace Federation's Office of Peace and Security Affairs in Washington, D.C. Dr. Barry added, “To me, the issue is whether that high regard for True Parents will carry on to his successor, Kim Jong Un. Since Kim Jong Un is only 28, it is most likely that senior elders, especially his uncle, Jang Song Thaek, the husband of Kim Jong Il's sister, may act as a “regent” to Kim Jong Un at least until he builds his own power base of younger leaders.”

“However, the most serious issue – one which I think Kook Jin Moon [Chairman of the Tongil Group and son of Rev. Sun Myung Moon] is very concerned about – is the role China may now play,” Barry continued in his email to Familyfed.org. “Especially in recent years, China has more means of economic, political and military influence over the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea); when all the ROK (Republic of Korea) and U.S. do is impose sanctions on it. China increasingly is able to interpenetrate North Korea; it has a lot of eyes and ears. In the short run, this will produce regional stability, but in the long term, North Korea is in danger of becoming an economic colony of China or a state whose foreign policy will be controlled by China. North Korea may no longer remain independent, and Korean unification would eventually take place only if China believes it would be in its interests. Privately, the North Koreans are very suspicious of China, but they need to survive, and they have had no one else to turn to, especially since 2001.

“The most important thing right now is for the U.S. and ROK to show restraint, especially not to make harsh statements about the North or Kim Jong Il. In 1994, ROK President Kim Yong Sam called Kim Il Sung an “aggressor” after the latter died, which closed a window of opportunity where the South could have extended condolences and created a dramatically improved relationship at a critical moment. I'm concerned that the leaders of both the U.S. and ROK must be very careful, because despite the sudden demise of Kim Jong Il, it does not mean the North is on the verge of collapse and by no means should be pushed to the brink.”

Korean media, including the Yonhap News Agency, said South Korea put its military on “high alert” and that President Lee Myung Bak convened a national security council meeting after the news of Kim's death.

Dr. Thomas Ward, a specialist in Peace and Development Studies at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut observed: “The visit of Rev. Hyung Jin Moon just prior to President Kim Jong Il’s passing could prove to be of some comfort to the new Korean Leader. Kim Jong Un is Hyung Jin Nim's junior. Like him, however, he is a youngest son who has inherited a major responsibility. For genuine reform to begin in North Korea, Kim Jong Un will need the support and counsel of mentors beyond his immediate circle and beyond the formal diplomatic channels that are available to him. Someone needs to win his confidence. I am sure that Rev. Hyung Jin Moon could be a great practical and spiritual supporter at a time when Kim Jong Un mourns the passing of his father and ponders whether or not to take Pyongyang in a much needed, new direction.”

A theological perspective came from Dr. Antonio Betancourt, director of the Office of Peace and Security Affairs of the Universal Peace Federation International: “The affairs of North Korea, in my opinion, are internally connected with God's providence and our True Parents.

“This is a fact that has to be taken into consideration when we analyze the events taken place in that country especially the death of their leader Kim Jong Il. There is a lot of activity from the Spirit World in anticipation of 2012-2013 and with the activities programmed by Heaven for this upcoming month of January, one of them with cosmic significance, the elevation and empowerment of True Mother. It is possible that all of these require a major offering from the Korean Cain camp. Who can be better representative of the Korean Cain camp than Kim Jong Il himself?

“He earned enough merit for God when he created the conditions for True Parents to go to North Korea in 1991 for the reconciliation with Kim Il Sung, their enemy for more than 40 years and the visit and return of True Parents to their hometown. Everything was done thanks to him. He opened the door for our movement to gain credibility with the U.S. and South Korean governments as real players in the future affairs of the Korean peninsula.

“The visit of our UPF Chairman Hyung Jin Nim and his wife [Dec. 9-16, 2011] basically closes a chapter of 21 years of True Parents’ direct internal and external involvement in the DPRK. This started in 1990 when True Parents asked me (Antonio Betancourt) to do whatever it takes to go North Korea to convey the news that the Unification Church no longer saw them [North Korea] as our enemies and that our movement was looking for reconciliation. After a year of arduous efforts I was admitted into North Korea officially and openly as a member of the Unification Church thanks to the friendship and the good office of former President of Costa Rica, the late Rodrigo Carazo.

“This was in May of 1991. In September, 1991, Dr Bo Hi Pak was able to visit North Korea officially as a special envoy of True Parents. On November 30, 1991 True Parents entered North Korea.

“I was in North Korea the day that Kim Il Sung died, in 1994. I was there for a week, sent by our True Parents to explore the possibility of opening a chapter of the Federation for World Peace. We got the verbal approval from President Kim Il Sung, and the next day, he passed away. “We don't know for sure, but it makes sense at least for us believers of our True Parents that the Spirit World has acted taking Kim Jong Il into the Spirit World to serve a higher purpose as part of some Providential Work,” Dr. Betancourt wrote.