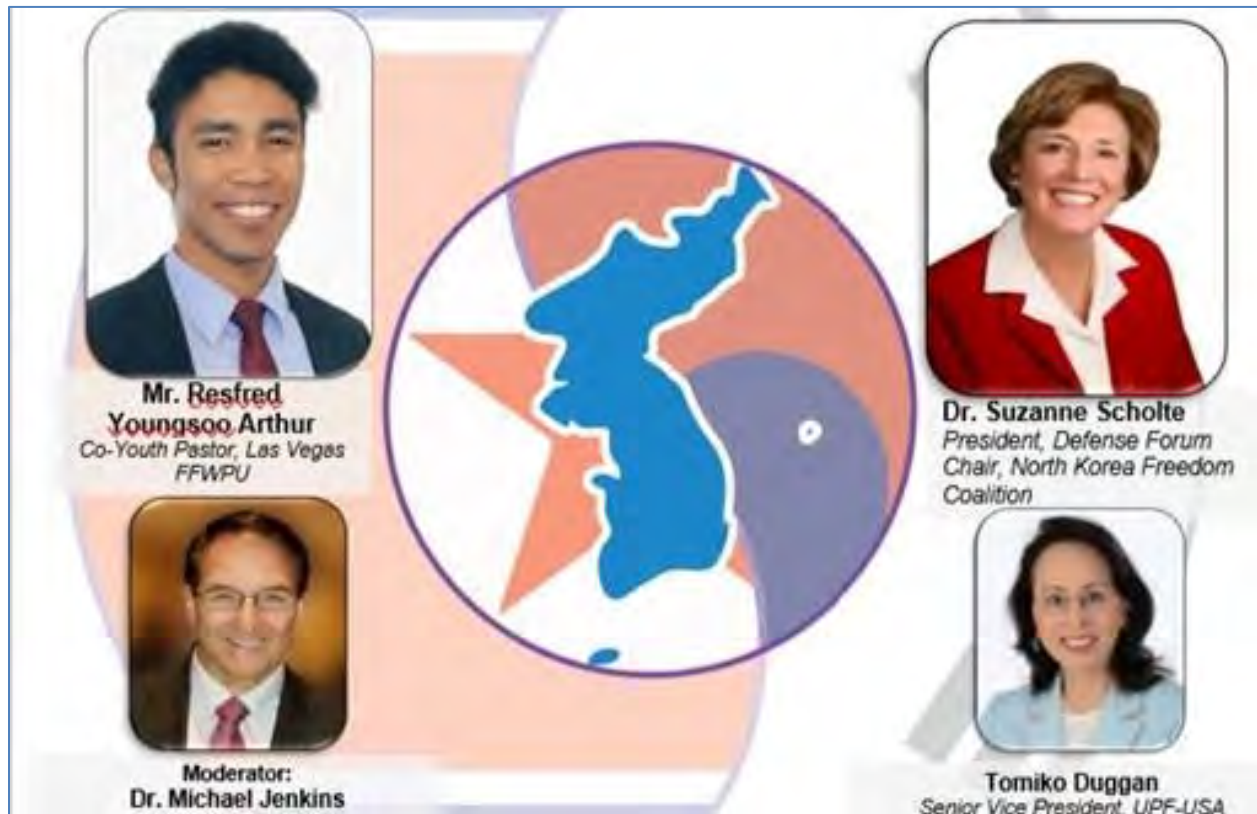


UPF USA: IAPD Speakers Share Realities of Life in North and South Korea

Tomiko Duggan
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IAPD, United States - The deprivation faced by North Koreans, including being cut off from information about the outside world, was the main focus of a webinar hosted by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) on August 13, 2024. It was IAPD's 45th Peace Forum on the theme "Track Two Diplomacy: Commitment to Peace; Challenges and Hope for Unification on the Korean Peninsula."

Ms. Tomiko Duggan, senior vice president of UPF-USA and US coordinator of IAPD, pointed out in her introduction that the Korean peninsula is home to one people who share the same ancestral roots, culture, spiritual heritage, and history. The Korean people's well-being therefore requires a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.

Dr. Michael Jenkins, president of UPF-International and chair of UPF-USA, served as program moderator. He shared insights from his recent meeting with 28 people who had escaped North Korea. They described their profound experiences of liberation, but also of shock at how very different the world outside of North Korea is from what they were indoctrinated to believe. He said he realized, through these individuals, that the work of promoting freedom and liberation from darkness to light is the work of God.

Dr. Suzanne Scholte, president of the Defense Forum Foundation, was the main speaker. She had just completed a weeklong speaking tour with 15 North Korean defectors for the 21st Annual North Korea Freedom Week, from July 7-13. Her foundation has sponsored this program since 1996, bringing North

Koreans to the United States to publicly testify about life in North Korea.

Dr. Scholte said that many North Korean defectors have shared with her that getting true information into North Korea is the key to combatting the deception and disinformation to which their people are exposed. In particular, South Korean K-pop music and dramas, recorded on flash drives and sent in by balloons, reveal that South Koreans have a much better quality of life. One defector said that a single flash drive that arrives in North Korea will be copied 1000 times, because people are hungry not only for food, but for information.

This is clearly having an impact, having provoked North Korean President Kim Jong Un to send balloons full of trash to South Korea. Also, she said, he has recently started planting landmines at his border with China, to deter people from trying to escape.

Dr. Scholte praised South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol for his focus on promoting freedom and human rights in North Korea. Under the South Korean constitution, the North Korean people are citizens of South Korea. Pres. Yoon has vowed never to repatriate any North Korean, and to help those that are trapped in China who want to get to South Korea.

North Koreans who escaped and are living in freedom in South Korea are desperate to share their new reality with their loved ones back in North Korea, Dr. Scholte said. They want to tell them that South Korea is a prosperous nation, and its people are not their enemy. Also, America is not their enemy.

Rev. Resfred Arthur, a youth pastor in Las Vegas, then shared some insights from his recent trip to South Korea. He was born in Ghana, West Africa, to a Ghanaian father and a Japanese mother who were both missionaries for many years. He participated in a 10-day visit to South Korea with 420 young people from the United States, Europe and Asia.

The group learned of the tragic history of the Korean War. They visited the Han River Bridge that was blown up in 1950 by the South Koreans to stop the invading North Korean army, causing many South Korean casualties. At the Korean War Memorial they saw planes, tanks, and other relics of war, including many illustrations of refugees fleeing the fighting. At the demilitarized zone, overlooking North Korea, they all offered prayers for peace.

As part of a new generation with an inclusive, international worldview, Rev. Arthur expressed his hope that never again would lives be lost over ideological differences. As an example that attitudes have changed, he mentioned incidents that took place at the recent Paris Olympics. He explained that he was moved by scenes of South Korean athletes taking friendly photos with North Korean athletes. This, he said, was evidence that people of today don't harbor resentment over the past.

Dr. Jenkins concluded by thanking Dr. Scholte and Rev. Arthur for sharing their insights and experiences.