

ILC2021 Japan, August 19: Session VII - 115th Interreligious Forum

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Tokyo, Japan - The seventh session of UPF-Japan's August-September International Leadership Conference 2021 (ILC2021) was the 115th Interreligious Forum, which was hosted by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD). Eighty (80) people, including scholars and Ambassadors for Peace representing the Shinto, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths, attended the program, whose theme was "Prayer for Japan-Korea Friendship and Peaceful Unification of Korean Peninsula."

The opening declaration was made by Mr. Shinobu Ishimaru, coordinator of IAPD-Japan and president of the Inter-religious Federation for World Peace. This was followed by an opening prayer offered by the priest of Amano-iwakura Jingu, Taishu Nara and opening remarks given by Mr. Masayoshi Kajikuri, chairman of UPF-Japan, on behalf of the organizers. He stated:

"In addition to working on the Middle East Peace Initiative, UPF has been working on the Northeast Asia Peace Initiative since 2011. As part of this effort, it launched Think Tank 2022 this year and is advancing full-fledged discussions around the world toward the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Because this reunification will be the touchstone for world peace, it has been holding International Leadership Conferences (ILCs) in various regions with experts to create substantial plans to achieve this goal. This forum is being held as an IAPD session. Based on Japan-South Korea friendship, I hope that religious people can reconnect with the hearts of those who whose have been torn and call for the realization of peace through prayer."

Then, Rev. Nishitani, chief priest of Tentoku-ji Temple in Iki city on the island of Iki in Nagasaki prefecture, gave a keynote speech titled, "Friendly Ties between Japan and Korea - a History and Tribute to the Martyrs of Iki."

In the early morning of October 11, 1945, a ship with passengers from Korea returning there was forced to evacuate at Ashibe Port in Iki city due to damage it had sustained from strong winds and high waves

from an approaching typhoon. Relief efforts undertaken by Iki residents were futile, as 168 passengers lost their lives and many others went missing. The late chief priest of Tentoku-ji Temple buried the dead. Since then, a memorial service has been held every year, and the current chief priest has led these efforts since 1983. In 1967, volunteer firefighters from the island built a monument dedicated to the disaster victims, and from 1998, the Japan-Korea Joint Memorial Ceremony for Disaster Victims at Ashibe Port has been held with Sugogsa Temple alternating every other year with Bulguksa temple in Gyeongju, South Korea, strengthening friendships between Japan and South Korea.



Rev. Nishitani went on to say that a Korean TV documentary had featured the disaster, and that he was shocked when it reported that the people of Iki had left the passengers to die. This prompted him to thoroughly investigate the involvement of Iki residents in the disaster and searched out survivors or those who were alive at the time of the incident. He came into contact with a son of one of the survivors. This person's testimony of what he had heard from his father helped clear any misunderstandings.

While speaking about all of this, Rev. Nishitani emphasized the importance of the ties forged between Japan and South Korea, and said that he hopes the remains of the victims will, one day, be safely returned to Korea.

After Rev. Nishitani's talk, three messages were given by several religious figures: chief priest Byeok-om Yun of Kokuhei-ji Temple in Nagasaki, which commemorates Korean victims of the atomic bombing; Bishop Charles Hall of the Christian Ministries Far East-Japan Worship Center, who has volunteered extensively in Far East Asia since serving in the military; and chief priests Gyoan Cho and Wakou Higashi, who hold memorial services and partake in peace activities for Hiroshima survivors. They all shared their desire for peace from their respective viewpoints.

Rev. Nishitani and representatives from the Buddhist, Muslim and Christian faiths gave a "prayer for remembrance and peace" before a final hymn called, "Let Us Live Together," was sung.

The session concluded with a reading of UPF founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon's speech, "A Providential View of the Pacific Rim Era in Light of God's Will I," given on September 23, 2007.