

LC2021 UPF Europe and the Middle East (EUME): Session VII – Media

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Europe and the Middle East -- The seventh session of the August 2021 International Leadership Conference focused on the potential of the media to support the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

From August 19 to 21, seven sessions of the ILC were held online under the title "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Prospects for Economic Development and Peace, and Ideologies, Worldviews, and International Relations."

The August 21 session titled "The Role of the Media in Contributing to Peace on the Korean Peninsula" was organized jointly by UPF and its International Media Association for Peace (IMAP).

A total of 252 participants attended the Zoom broadcast, with 380 watching the livestream on the UPF Europe Facebook page.

The panelists, consisting of media professionals from Korea, Europe, and the United States, attempted to throw the spotlight on the role of the media in promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula. They addressed important questions regarding media ethics and press freedom, which are prerequisites for mutual trust and understanding between people of different backgrounds, raised by the question of peace on the Korean Peninsula, which is as fragile today as it was during the decades after the Korean War.

South Korea is targeted in an ideological crossfire between powerful players due to its unique strategic position in Asia. Even in "peacetime," a war of conflicting narratives, largely conveyed by the media, is raging. Therefore, the role of the media is equally vital in times of war and peace. Most importantly, the media can be a powerful aid in conflict resolution and peacemaking.



Peter Zoehrer, the IMAP coordinator for Europe and the Middle East, was the moderator for the session. He explained the background of the webinar and introduced the panelists.

Thomas McDevitt from the United States, the chair of *The Washington Times* and global coordinator of IMAP, began by describing the situation on the Korean Peninsula as a doorway that could open a great new era of peace and prosperity or could plunge the world into a very dark and dangerous future.

He described the global and multi-faceted movement founded by the late Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, both originally from North Korea, as fully supporting peaceful reunification. "We see two Koreas so different in outcomes, but they have the same culture, history and language," Mr. McDevitt said. He also referred to the speech of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon before some 80 members of the US Congress in 2016, in which she emphasized the need for a God-centered movement if we are to solve the difficult problems the world is facing.



He went on to quote from the evangelical historian and philosopher Os Guinness, who liked to say, "Contrast is the mother of clarity."

"When the world seems so dark, the emerging light of a new view of life centered on the highest ideals of true love that transcend the barriers of race, religion, culture, and national boundaries is now becoming more evident with each passing day," Mr. McDevitt said. "This is a new view of reality that is beginning to take root. That's the stuff we as journalists need to be watching for. To tell the world where we can find real hope and opportunity."

Mr. McDevitt described the founding of IMAP during the World Summit in February 2020, which brought together 520 journalists from 71 countries under the banner of UPF. "IMAP encourages the development of a free and responsible global media industry that is highly trusted, independent and prosperous, and accessible to all people," he said. "And, as the 'peace' in IMAP's name suggests, we encourage news media to shine a light on dialogue, collaboration, conflict resolution and, most of all, solutions -- as a way to promote human development, God-given human rights, social well-being, freedom, and prosperity." To conclude, he invited the attendees to work together to build a world of lasting peace, prosperity and human fulfillment centered on God.

Andrew Salmon MBE from the United Kingdom, Northeast Asia correspondent and editor at *Asia Times*, suggested that the media are not in the business of contributing to peace. "The duty of the most basic media worker, the reporter, is to record the facts on the ground. We are not diplomats any more than we are warriors; however, we share a common humanity, so we need to tell human stories," he said. However, in this regard, there is a big hole in our reporting right now, he said.

He described how, in the past, he reported from the border of China with North Korea, one of the best places on earth to get an insight into what is happening in North Korea. In the Chinese city of Dandong, he was even able to interview an ex-North Korean minister of labor. However, in today's China reporting is becoming difficult and risky, Mr. Salmon said. One of his friends, Canadian Michael Spavor, in 2018 was sentenced to 11 years in prison in China for spying. *[Mr. Spavor and another Canadian journalist were released in September 2021 after nearly three years in detention.]* As well as China, North Korea also has completely closed itself to the world, and it is now harder than ever before to tell the human

story.

But while there is value in telling human stories, there also is value in delivering bigger-picture analyses, Mr. Salmon said, and fortunately we still have South Korea from which to deliver that. Moreover, South Korea is arguably the best place from which to report on North Korea, as there is obvious national interest and a wide infrastructure of experts, pundits, defectors and specialist media.

"From Kabul, reports are telling terribly moving human stories," Mr. Salmon said, "but what we are not getting is analyses of why Afghanistan merited a 20-year Western mission. Similarly, it is critical to add context to Korean stories," he said. "We need to show how long-term engagement can lead to long-term success. Amid all this talk about 'America's longest war,' we need to remember that the United States put boots on Korean soil in 1945. South Korea today is an economic powerhouse, a stable democracy, a vibrant society. While we inevitably focus on short-term news reports, this deep context should be implicit, perhaps even explicit."



Jung Mi Hwang, vice president and executive editor of the *Segye Ilbo* newspaper (*Segye Times*), described her visit to North Korea in 2000 to cover the first inter-Korean summit between South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. She was assigned a female guide who claimed to be an employee of the Pyongyang Publishing Company, but was evidently a well-trained intelligence agent who made it impossible for the reporters to interview ordinary people. For three days, she was able to realize how different Koreans from the North are from the South. "Although we spoke the same language, Korean, our views of the world, as well as our national systems, were totally different," she said. What struck her the most was their blind praise for Kim Jong Il. They were living in the country of Kim Jong Il, by Kim Jong Il, for Kim Jong Il.

To achieve the peaceful reunification of Korea, Ms. Hwang emphasized the importance of telling North Koreans the truth about the outside world. However, following complaints by Kim Jung Un's younger sister, Kim Yo Jung, the South Korean government passed a law to prevent the sending of balloons to North Korea that carried anti-regime leaflets along with small radios, Bibles, rice, medicine, USB sticks and cash. Ms. Hwang said this law prevents freedom of expression, which is the essence of democracy, and blocks North Koreans' right to know. It is also an anti-humanitarian punishment, as it blocks even the minimum amount of rice and medicine from being sent to the North.

Ms. Hwang expressed her concern that the younger generation in South Korea these days are not interested in reunification, while the current government dismisses unification as a matter for the distant future. However, she believes that peace on the Korean Peninsula will be possible only when unification is ultimately achieved. For this to happen, the media should contribute toward reducing the quantitative and qualitative gap of knowledge and information between South and North Korean citizens. In this context, she mentioned that the co-founders of the *Segye Times*, Rev. and Mrs. Moon, established national reunification as the first goal of the newspaper.

Guy Taylor, national security team leader and foreign policy reporter at *The Washington Times*, offered a few remarks on the key pillars of responsibility for both government-sponsored and private and non-profit news media and communication companies inside and outside the region. These include:

- Promoting and maintaining awareness that free-market, democratic societies should tolerate and

not be intimidated by the presence of a free media space full of political opposition and critical debate or criticism of government leadership.

- The pillar of conscientiousness that the media should have toward civil political discourse. Just because the media space supports freedom of debate and criticism, that should not be an excuse for crass or base or racist or insulting rhetoric, or an opening for exploitation by radical elements of a given society.



Mr. Taylor also spoke of the need for free media in the Asia-Pacific region to push for opening of coverage, information, and communications both with China and North Korea. This should include access to all parts of China, such as the city of Wuhan, where the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to have begun, but also the Xinjiang autonomous region, where Chinese authorities have been accused by the U.S. government of genocide against Muslims and ethnic minorities. "Beijing claims these accusations are baseless. Well, it should allow outside journalists into those areas, then," he said.

With regard to North Korea, he said, the whole world might benefit from greater coordination among free media companies, not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also in the West. The media could be working together more effectively to petition the North Korean government to hold conferences inviting foreign media into the country, he said. This would create a basic opening for on-the-ground coverage, as well as some civil society dialogue between Pyongyang and the rest of the world that has been stifled in recent years.



He concluded by expressing his appreciation for the media space in the Asia-Pacific region and his hope that soon journalists would be able to travel to the region again.

Session moderator Peter Zoehrer posed a question: "Do the panelists think there is scope for the organization of more media exchange and information visits by foreign journalists to the Korean Peninsula, North and South, to encourage them to produce more balanced coverage on the human and shared cultural side of the relationship?"

Mr. McDevitt mentioned that the World Media Association organized dozens of high-level fact-finding trips behind the Iron Curtain and elsewhere, taking journalists there, which ultimately resulted in a conference in the Soviet Union and a meeting with President Mikhail Gorbachev. He encouraged the members of the panel to explore with him the possibility of organizing some new fact-finding trips on this issue, starting with an IMAP conference in Beijing. He also cited a recently published report on public diplomacy with North Korea by Dr. Ji-Eun Baek of the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.



Sandra Skrodzki from Hungary, a board member of the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, an organization that is affiliated with UPF, presented questions from the audience to the panelists.

Asked how the media can give young South Koreans a potential image of reunification, Ms. Hwang admitted that they are mostly interested in their own happiness and do not want to take on the economic burden that unification would bring. She stressed the important role of the media to provide them with education and inspire them with the dream of one big country.

Mr. Salmon stressed that the role of the media is to cover news and that unification literally is not happening, it's not on the horizon, so it's not a news story. It's not the media who should be doing this, but popular culture, he said. "If you want to get the attention of young people, you need [South Korean boy band] BTS to be talking about unification," he said.

Mr. Taylor mentioned a K-pop concert that Kim Jung Un had allowed in North Korea a few years ago and went on to explain that a certain number of North Korean defectors have established a wide following on social media through which they are able to inform young South Koreans about the conditions in North Korea.

Ms. Hwang said we also have to consider the existence of the young "*Jangmadang* (market) Generation" in North Korea, who are aware of the value of property and trading.

In response to the question of whether responsible and moral media are incompatible with a communist regime and the North Korean system, Mr. Taylor said he doesn't think so, because media that recognize criticism of power structures also recognize that power belongs in the hands of the people and that criticism of power structures can be made in a mature and calm way.

Mr. Salmon concluded: "Those who say that communism and good journalism are incompatible should read the book *The Hell of Treblinka* by Vasily Grossman, the Jewish Red Army journalist who was at [the battles of] Stalingrad, Kursk, and Berlin, as well as at the liberation of the death camp in Treblinka in early 1945. As someone who survived both Auschwitz and Treblinka, he said Auschwitz was a holiday camp compared to what happened at Treblinka. His book is some of the finest engaged moral journalism to be found."