

Think Tank 2022 Forum Europe and Middle East, February 2: IAFLP Session

Simran Rai
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Europe and the Middle East - The fifth Think Tank 2022 session discussed the creation of a "women's peace zone" at Korea's Demilitarized Zone.

The session, which took place on February 2, was titled "Co-Creating Spaces for Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula: What Steps Are Women Taking toward Sustainable Peace?"

It was held jointly by the Europe-Middle East and Korean branches of UPF's International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP), together with the Europe-Middle East branch of Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an organization that is affiliated with UPF.

The eight webinars of the Think Tank 2022 Global Forum were held from February 1 to 3 as a precursor to the events of World Summit 2022, which would be held in Seoul, South Korea, and online from February 11 to 13.

The Think Tank 2022 webinars were held not only in Europe and the Middle East but also in Asia, Africa, and the Americas by UPF and its associations. Several of the online sessions were held jointly with UPF associations from other continents.



[Carolyn Handschin, coordinator, IAFLP, Europe and the Middle East; international vice president, WFWPI](#) In her opening words, Carolyn Handschin, coordinator of the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) in Europe and the Middle East and the international vice president of Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI), spoke about the unique role of first ladies: "a supportive, non-political, mentor-like or mother-like role." First ladies can have a great impact on peace and development, in ways that often are overlooked, she said.

In the context of Korean reunification, the session focused on creating spaces for "incubating" peace and shared prosperity, following a proposal by WFWPI and partners to create a "women's peace zone" at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea.



[Dr. Colette Mazzucelli, Graduate Faculty, NYU New York](#) Moderated by Dr. Colette Mazzucelli, an adjunct associate professor at New York University (specializing in conflict resolution, radicalization and religion), the speakers lent their experiences to the situation in Korea.



[H.E. Elsie Christofia, First Lady Cyprus \(2008-2013\)](#) H.E. Elsie Christofia, the first lady of Cyprus (2008-2013), explained that her country has been divided for almost 48 years, with 37 percent of its territory under Turkish occupation. She spoke of the need for Greek and Turkish Cypriots to build a relationship of trust based on honesty and mutual respect, and she stated that women can have a huge influence on this.

As an example, she said the biggest heartache of the Cypriot people is the tragedy of the 2,000 missing Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots.

Via the Missing Persons Committee, Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot scientists combined forces to identify the remains of 1,023 people and return them to their families for burial. This was a strong positive example for the future of Cyprus, Mrs. Christofia said.

Creating a physical, bicomunal space of political equality (as defined by the UN secretary-general's reports) for women of the two Koreas could establish a similarly positive example for the Korean people, the first lady said. After all, no matter what culture, a mother's pain is still the same.



[Dr. Anna Grichting, Professor of Architecture and Landscape Urbanism, Switzerland](#) Professor Anna Grichting from Switzerland, a professor of architecture and landscape urbanism, spoke about the Korean Peace Incubator in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas, which she is developing in collaboration with WFWPI and other stakeholders.

She emphasized the importance of environmental peacebuilding, an emerging field. Having created an ecological "belt" at the site of the former Berlin Wall, she said she looks at how to transform spaces of division into hubs of biodiversity, conservation and a commemorative symbol of hope.

There is already a precedent of women working in the DMZ, through marches and initiatives such as Korean Peace Now, Professor Grichting said. She hopes to gather momentum from these initiatives, also focusing on sacred sites whose significance precedes the conflict in Korea and are valued by both sides, in this way unifying them. She is also focused on involving the youth, helping to shift the perspective of the younger generation to that of optimism and enthusiasm.

Professor Grichting spoke about changing from "ego" to "eco" - that is, changing our perspective from one that is selfish and individual-centric to one that is earth and whole-centric. As former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated, we need to focus on "inclusive peace."



[Hon. Christine Muttonen, President, OECD Parliament \(2016; 2017\)](#) Hon. Christine Muttonen from Austria, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2016-2017), said that although the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was intended to involve women in conflict and peace negotiations, it has not been implemented sufficiently. Mrs. Muttonen spoke of the common neglect of women in daily life and public spaces, let alone in the area of peacemaking.

Creating secure and inspiring environments for women fosters their creativity and potential, crossing borders not just physically but also mentally, she said. In this way we can help the younger generation to rid themselves of prejudices toward the "other" side.

Art and culture also will play a major role in this, breaking down barriers and allowing for deeper connections, Mrs. Muttonen said. We can see that the opportunity to meet physically will greatly accelerate these developments, she said.

Following the first three presentations, there was a question-and-answer session in which Dr. Mazzucelli's students, as well as the virtual audience, were able to ask the panel some questions.

"What specific projects do you envision for the DMZ?"

Mrs. Christofia and Professor Grichting both answered this question: The primary focus is on healing the people and healing the landscape. Our shared pain is our shared future. Just as in Cyprus with the case of the missing peoples, Korea has a history of many victims, from Korea but also internationally. The DMZ must be a place of commemoration so as not to forget, but it also must symbolize forgiveness. A landscape of memory rather than a monument emphasizes this process of healing.

"How can Koreans use these ideas in practice without the support of political leaders?"

Professor Grichting and Mrs. Handschin answered this question: It's easy to focus on the large-scale vision, but we should not overlook the achievements already being made. This event itself is a promising start to collaboration and beginning conversations around re-unification.

"How do we involve political leadership at earlier stages?"

Mrs. Handschin and Dr. Mazzucelli answered this: Efforts need to be made from both sides; persistence is key. Women are more sensitive to the need for peace and reconciliation; therefore it is important for women to speak up. We need a vision before we define a solution.

After the question-and-answer session, the second part of the program ensued with two more speakers.



[Mr. Teson Chon, North Korean Youth Representative, Japan](#) Teson Chon, a North Korean youth representative and Korean unification advocate who resides in Japan, said his paternal grandfather was originally from North Korea and at 16 fled to Japan, never to see his family again. Having attended Korean school in Japan for nine years, Mr. Chon is very aware of the relationship between his country of residence and his country of origin.

The Korean Peninsula was one nation until its occupation by Japan. Following liberation from Japan, the Korean War led to the country being split along the DMZ. Although it is called the Korean War, 61 other nations were involved, under the UN. It was a large battle of communism vs. democracy, displacing and dividing countless families.

When discussing Korean unification, it is important to Mr. Chon to include those displaced Koreans in nations such as Japan. They also have a strong desire to reclaim their ancestors' country, he said.

Mr. Chon described a dance created by such children, showing their desire for reunification.

He suggested an event in which children from North and South Korea, as well as children of Korean descent, would join hands at the DMZ. He believes these young people are the key to a successful reunification.



[Dr. Heung Soon Park, Prof., Vice President, UN Association, Republic of Korea](#) Dr. Heung Soon Park, a professor and the vice president of the UN Association of the Republic of Korea, mentioned a proposal that the United Nations build its the fifth office in the Demilitarized Zone. Dr. Park said it is clear that international solidarity is key when it comes to improving tensions between North and South Korea.

South Korea is a dynamic country with a booming economy, whereas North Korea is isolated, maintaining tensions mainly through weapons development. Although the South is willing to cooperate, the North still needs to stop developing nuclear weapons in order for relations to progress further. The situation is not so bright yet, but finding ways to discuss peacefully between citizens is a powerful way to make progress.

Dr. Park reckons that this bottom-up approach will help to raise awareness. He is grateful for initiatives such as those that WFWPI is promoting at the DMZ, and for the international support.

Our final speakers were asked about student meetings, as Mr. Chon had suggested. They spoke about the difficulties from each side, the young people and the authorities, and agreed to work together to make such an event happen.



[Dr. Zoe Bennett, vice president, WFWPI Middle East; President, WFWP Cyprus](#) Dr. Zoe Bennett, the vice president of WFWPI in the Middle East, offered closing remarks, explaining how the division of the Korean Peninsula reflects division in many other parts of the world. There is a lot to learn from these circumstances, said, promising a follow-up event coming after such a fruitful discussion.