

UPF Turkey and Korea conference about Turkish soldiers who fought in Korea

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Istanbul, Turkey -- UPF chapters in Turkey and Korea held an online conference about the Turkish soldiers who fought in the Korean War.

The webinar, "Turkey-Korea: Opportunities for Cooperation," was held on February 20, 2021. The Turkish and Korean (Region 5) chapters of UPF and its constituent association International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP) organized the conference together.

Seventy years ago, in the winter of 1951, thousands of young Turkish soldiers found themselves in North Korea fighting as part of the UN Forces, which had already reached deep across the 38th parallel and were expecting to finish off the communist forces.



The tables were turned, however, by a sudden attack by a massive force of Chinese soldiers. Caught in an unexpected trap, the Turkish soldiers refused to retreat against overwhelming odds and turned the military tide around, even rescuing an American unit from destruction.

Mindful of such a history, Dr. Young-bae Park, president of UPF-Korea Region 5, expressed his appreciation for the 14,936 Turkish veterans, saying, "Thanks to their sacrifices, we on this peninsula now enjoy a confident and happy republic." He urged all of those present "to deepen the friendly relations in order to achieve Korea's unification, which must be the veterans' wishes, as well."

Recounting one of the most crucial battlefield successes of the Turkish units in the Korean War, Dr. Ali Denizli, a professor of Rumeli University in Istanbul and the author of 18 books on the Korean War, described the advance of the Turkish brigade from Seoul, through Pyongyang and Anju, then reaching Kunu-ri region.

A retired army officer and the son of a Turkish veteran of the Korean War, Dr. Denizli repeated his belief that in order to enhance mutual cooperation, two peoples should revisit the bonds forged by their common history. He insisted that the people of South Korea should clearly recognize the precious sacrifices made by the Turkish young soldiers to defend freedom and democracy -- the very democracy which formed the basis for the powerful nation of Korea which has emerged in the past decades.



The 70-minute forum was attended by about 190 people -- including Koreans, Turks, Japanese, Europeans, Ambassadors for Peace, Korean War veterans, representatives of civil society -- who all share an interest in developing a more favorable environment for peaceful settlement on the Korean Peninsula.

According to Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, chair of UPF for Europe and the Middle East, "UPF has been organizing quite a few events around the world" with similar objectives. He noted that 2021 will commemorate the 30th anniversary of a Pyongyang visit by UPF co-founders Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon in 1991.

Representing South Korea, Professor Ok-ju Choi, who explores Korea's intangible resources, spoke movingly of an intuition she had while visiting the UN Memorial Cemetery in her city of Busan. As she laid flowers at the Turkish altar in front of tombs dedicated to 462 Turkish soldiers, she felt as if their spirits were unable to come home because their war mission had not been finished.

In order to fulfill their desire for a peaceful Korea, Professor Choi proposed a solution in the field that she termed "culture-nomics." Based on her years of research on cinema arts, she sees the potential for a film that could inspire the world: Jointly produced by the two countries, it could feature peacebuilding on the peninsula and a love story between Koreans and Turks.

Endorsing a similar soft-power approach, Umberto Angelucci, the UPF Middle East regional chair, testified to a 2010 initiative by the UPF co-founders to sponsor a tour of the Little Angels Children's Folk Ballet of Korea to the 16 nations, including Turkey, that had dispatched soldiers to the Korean War under the UN flag.

A video of the Little Angels' visit to Turkey was shown, in which then-President Abdullah Gül warmly received their delegation at his palace, listening to their singing of the Turkish national anthem. The video also showed their visit to the Korean War Memorial Park in Ankara, the capital, together with surviving Korean War veterans.

Mr. Angelucci pointed out, "Unless we heal the hearts of those who have sacrificed themselves for a higher purpose, peace will never come." Based on this conviction, Mr. Angelucci confirmed that this Turkey-Korea series will continue so as to explore genuine opportunities for the two countries located at the east and west ends of the Asian continent. David Fraser Harris, the secretary general of UPF of the Middle East, moderated the online conference.