

UPF Europe and the Middle East ILC: The United Nations and Korean Peninsula

Renate Amesbauer with Heiner Handschin and Mary Hinterleitner
June 30, 2021



ILC2021-6 Session 5 "The United Nations and the Korean Peninsula"

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
ILC2021
UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION
ILC 2021 WEBINAR SERIES JUNE 24-30, 2021
UPF EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST

MODERATOR
MS. SRRUTHI LEKHA
UN Representative for Peacebuilding and Youth Leadership, WFWPI

SPEAKERS

AMB. DR. JESUS DOMINGO
Ambassador of the Philippines to New Zealand; Former Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines.

DR. TARIQ RAUF
Former Head of Verification and Security Policy, International Atomic Energy Agency

DR. ANGELA MICKLEY
Professor for Peace Education, Conflict Resolution and Ecology, Potsdam University of Applied

MR. HEINER W. HANDSCHIN
Director, UPF Office for UN Relations at UNOG, Geneva

00:10

zoom

Europe and the Middle East -- The fifth session of the June 2021 International Leadership Conference was titled "The United Nations and the Korean Peninsula."

The June 30 session was one of six ILC webinars that were held from June 24 to 30, 2021, under the theme of "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula."



Background

Representing the family of nations, the United Nations has the mandate to assist in developing "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" (from the Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Article 1). Korea has been divided since the end of World War II and remains without a formal peace agreement. Families have been separated for over 70 years, not knowing the situation of their loved ones. This unsolved tragedy, while very much an internal affair of the Koreans, needs the attention of the international community.

The session was organized to provide resources and good practices for de-escalation of tensions through disarmament and trust-building strategies. Speakers looked at the destabilizing effect of the nuclear issue and provided alternative tools for mediation and reconciliation. Finally, a UN-sponsored peace and development project was proposed for the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to provide a vision for stability on the Korean Peninsula and the whole region.

Speakers

Ambassador Dr. Jesus Domingo, ambassador of the Philippines to New Zealand; former assistant secretary of foreign affairs of the Philippines

Dr. Tariq Rauf, former head of verification and security policy, International Atomic Energy Agency

Dr. Angela Mickley, professor for peace education, conflict resolution and ecology, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Potsdam, Germany

Heiner W. Handschin, director, UPF Office for UN Relations at the United Nations Office at Geneva



Srruthi Lekha, UN representative for peacebuilding and youth leadership, Women's Federation for World Peace International, was the moderator.

Ambassador Dr. Jesus Domingo expressed his personal opinions and not official statements of the Philippines. He started by explaining some of the terminology that is frequently used: nuclear disarmament (completely eliminating nuclear weapons), nuclear non-proliferation (stopping new countries from having nuclear weapons) and arms control.

He explained the arguments for and against nuclear weapons. One argument for having nuclear weapons is that they have prevented a World War III, mainly because of deterrence -- everyone fears Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).



Of course, there are arguments against the production and use of nuclear weapons: They violate international humanitarian law. They violate the four principles of humanity, distinction, proportionality

and necessity.

He asked the audience to consider the positive effect if most or all of the money used for nuclear weapons would be invested in the socio-economic development of a country!

Finally Dr. Domingo voiced his opinion about imposing sanctions on a country: Longtime experience has shown that sanctions never help to reach the goal, while at the same time they severely harm the population of a country! Other, more distinct methods should be used to reach a necessary political goal, he said.



Dr. Tariq Rauf stated that, based on Chapter VII, Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council has the authority to impose sanctions as part of its mandate to maintain and restore international peace and order, including non-proliferation. The five permanent members of the Security Council have taken on a special responsibility in this area.

The implementation of sanctions, by the United Nations or any other power, has not resulted in a single instance of reversing the development of weapons of mass destruction, Dr. Rauf said. Such sanctions have failed not only with the DPRK but also with India, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria, as well as South Africa (in reaction to apartheid).

In fact, the record shows that sanctions not only have failed to stop the development, but in some cases even have accelerated the development of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, there always has been a devastating effect on the population of the country.

Dr. Rauf recommended using a step-by-step approach, which requires a leap of faith. This would mean lifting or reducing sanctions while at the same time demanding non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This gradually would allow the socio-economic development of the country and the building of trust.

Sadly, the US policy currently is going in completely the opposite direction, he said. Unfortunately, a valuable opportunity was lost following the final meeting of former President Donald Trump with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Based on the advice of the U.S. secretary of state and national security adviser, President Trump rejected North Korea's offer to destroy up to 80 percent of its nuclear weapons in return for lifting sanctions. Dr. Rauf said an unprecedented opportunity for peace on the Korean Peninsula was missed there.

Dr. Angela Mickley said her full interest is dealing with conflicts and resolving them. While other speakers outlined a political frame, Dr. Mickley concentrated on non-state actors and their influence, speaking from her own experiences.

Politics often produces high pressure, but pressure does not bring about changes, she said. On the contrary, according to her experience, pressure needs to be relieved and space for experience has to be created to allow development. To learn new behaviors, training is necessary, she said. Creating space for a change of attitude -- to see and do things differently -- is like putting "new tools in the toolbox."

Every citizen can bring about change, not only the political leadership, Dr. Mickley said. She gave the examples of Northern Ireland, Namibia and other places where conflicting parties were taken to a remote place for a longer period of time (three weeks); there they could find new ways of dealing with their

conflict peacefully. She also was invited to South Korea by the Ministry of Unification to prepare necessary steps for unification.

Dr. Mickley spoke briefly of her experience in East Germany after the unification of East and West, as her whole family lived there. She said, "It has been like becoming a refugee in your own country. ... It takes the carpet from underneath your feet." One of the reasons is that people in communist countries are used to having someone run their life and make most of the decisions. It is even more so for the people of North Korea, she said. Therefore, it is never easy for North Korean defectors to integrate into South Korean society.



Heiner W. Handschin, as director of the UPF Office for UN Relations, offered his thoughts on the topic of the United Nations and Korea: "Toward De-Escalation and Rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula."

His key interest was what the UN could do to become a neutral peace-broker on the Korean Peninsula?

There have been first steps toward rapprochement, when the U.S. president and the North Korean leader met, and there have been a number of summits.

Mr. Handschin said that it is necessary for everyone to keep an open mind for unexpected things to happen, as, for example, when German reunification occurred in 1990. According to the chief negotiator for German reunification, Claus J. Duisberg, in the beginning of 1989 nobody believed that this was going to happen.

Regarding the United Nations' support for a possible reunification of the two Koreas, Mr. Handschin sees two major problems:

First, the UN is mainly focused on the West. There are four major UN Headquarters, located in North America, Europe and Africa, but there is no comparable UN Office in Asia, where two thirds of the world's population live. In order to be more broadly accepted as a broker for peace, the UN should shift its focus and deal with the divided Korean Peninsula and other trouble spots in Asia as well.

Second, the United Nations has been partisan in the Korean War! The UN is still perceived as a hostile force by North Korea. Even though the DPRK joined the UN and many related international organizations in 1991, there is still the feeling of distrust, even enmity, toward the UN. The DPRK initially joined the International Atomic Energy Agency, but finally left in 1994. Also the DPRK didn't join any major economic organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the World Monetary Fund, or even the International Labor Organization. So there is a need to empower and help the DPRK to become a full member of the international community. Mr. Handschin felt that after the DPRK is really welcomed in the family of nations, the nuclear issue can be addressed more efficiently.

He showed a proposal for a Peace Park in the Demilitarized Zone and a fifth UN Office in Asia, which could address the lack of UN presence in the region. He reported about ongoing track II diplomacy being conducted by UPF and its partners to launch the project of UN representation for Asia in the Demilitarized Zone.

Starting in 2009 and involving key stakeholders from civil society and governments, this long-term peace project was launched at the UN in Geneva. A fifth UN Office could address various "trouble spots," including the divided Korean Peninsula, and could be a stabilizing factor for the region, he said.

In conclusion, Mr. Handschin presented a vision, developed by UPF and its partners, for a larger UN Peace Complex, or even a UN city, creating a landmark park and place of peaceful cooperation in the pristine natural environment at the DMZ between the two Koreas.