

UPF Europe and the Middle East parliamentarians addressed Korean reunification

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Europe and the Middle East - An online conference of parliamentarians addressed the issue of Korean reunification.

The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), one of the UPF associations, held a webinar on April 29, 2021, as one of the sessions of the International Leadership Conference organized by the Europe and Middle East branch of UPF.

Members of Parliament from Russia, Italy and the United Kingdom spoke on the topic "The Role of Parliamentarians in Contributing to Peace on the Korean Peninsula."

A total of 223 attendees participated in the online conference.



Speakers

Dr. Michael Balcomb, the regional chair for Europe and the Middle East of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization that is affiliated with UPF

Hon. Gadzhimurad Omarov, a deputy of the State Duma, Russian Federation

Sen. Roberto Rampi, a member of the Italian Senate and a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Hon. Keith Best, a former member of Parliament of the United Kingdom and the chair of UPF-UK

Baroness Sandip Verma, a member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom



Abstract

Seventy years ago, following World War II, the Korean people, who share a common history, culture, and language, were divided by the world superpowers' Cold War struggle. Considering its potential impact on global peace and development, the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula is a central focus of the IAPP, along with peace among all the nations of Northeast Asia.

Moderator Maria Nazarova, the president of UPF-Russia, warmly introduced the distinguished panelists. She opened the floor for the panelists to discuss three important questions:

Can Europe contribute to peace on the Korean Peninsula?

What role can be played by Russia, which connects Europe and Northeast Asia?

Can parliamentary diplomacy move forward the long-awaited peace process in this conflicted region?

Reiterating these questions, Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, in his welcoming remarks concisely outlined the origins of IAPP. He also explained why UPF strives to bring parliamentarians together to work on issues such as Korean reunification. It has been the lifelong dream of UPF founders Father and Mother Moon to see Korea united again. For 50 years Korea was occupied by Japan, and for 70 years since the war it has been a divided nation. Mr. Haider said he envisions the firm support of the international community for Korean reunification.

Dr. Michael Balcomb, the regional chair of FFWPU, drew the participants' attention to the historical details of the Korean War, i.e., who contributed to the division of Korea. He stressed that this conflict was never just about Korea but rather was the result of a clash of global forces. The reunification of the Korean Peninsula therefore is very much everyone's business, he said.

Dr. Balcomb said he has observed that the Korean people believe the conflict in question is only for the Korean people to resolve and that any potential contribution from the outside would be unwelcome.

Offering a contrasting perspective, Dr. Balcomb with many strong examples demonstrated cases in which help from the "outside" has greatly improved and sustained the peace and security of people and their nations. If we can work together, more major unsolved conflicts can be brought to an end, he said.

Hon. Gadzhimurad Omarov, a member of the Russian Parliament, said we are in an age when no nation can develop on its own any longer. Therefore, his vision involves nations putting aside their own agendas in order to focus on the bigger picture, helping each other to ensure the peace, safety and security of all.

Mr. Omarov, having recently come back from a trip across Africa, and challenged by his observations, spoke of the need for change in Sierra Leone - a country where the civil war ended in 2002. He was struck by the lives and destiny of the people following the civil war in the country, which reminded him of the situation on the Korean Peninsula - an ongoing conflict.

Mr. Omarov said he understands that Korea's division was decided by foreign nations and that they should not hesitate to contribute to the solution of this conflict.

Russia has been in diplomatic relations with South Korea for over 30 years, he said, and is still applying all efforts to assist peaceful reunification. Mr. Omarov expressed his passionate support for the unity of Korea.

Admiring the good works of UPF, Sen. Roberto Rampi from Italy, though unable to attend in person, responded to the call of this webinar with a recorded presentation.



"The Korean people have been divided for too long," he said.

Using his vast experience of being politically involved locally, nationally and internationally, he asserted that interdisciplinary work is essential to facilitate the progress toward a reunified, peaceful Korean Peninsula. Mr. Rampi suggested using cultural tools such as art and sports as a peaceful means to break down barriers.

Mr. Rampi, whose home is located on the same 38th parallel as the Korean Peninsula, said he feels compelled by such a connection to do something. He encouraged people to contribute to and organize initiatives of exchange with the two Koreas.

Hon. Keith Best, a former member of the UK Parliament, said he envisions a Korea unified by improved diplomacy, as dialogue is critical. Furthermore, he outlined the current responsibility of the European Union to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

He said he strongly believes that parliamentarians, especially those of Europe and the Middle East, can play a huge role in the dialogue. Mr. Best showed us how his many experiences have led to the ideas he has today.

He emphasized the opportunity for more and better dialogue by parliamentarians. As they do not represent their government, they have more freedom to examine areas of interest, with fewer diplomatic consequences. Their greater capacity to ascertain real issues of contention and red lines can be fed into the greater discussion, and sometimes can be more informative than what even the most sophisticated intelligence service can provide.

"How can we do the right thing if we cannot even have an open and honest debate?" Baroness Sandip Verma, a member of the United Kingdom's House of Lords, wondered. She explained her vision of a world in which interaction and engagement come at all levels, despite the political differences we may have.

Baroness Verma explained how interaction and collaboration of thought, solutions, practices, and delivering outcomes in a positive and friendly way have brought the best success in all governments in the past.

The challenge of COVID-19 and the current global crisis require an unfamiliar global response, which

means having shared interests worldwide, she said. Miscommunication and lack of shared interest between countries have made apparent the rifts throughout the world today that block us from the goal of unity.

In order to avoid the same mistakes leading to more discord, Baroness Verma emphasized the need for improved management of relationships across all borders.



Question-and-answer session

Mr. Omarov said that nations should put aside their own agendas and work toward one common goal, which is global peace and justice. He said he hopes that Koreans can take the initiative in uniting their country and wishes for further dialogue with Korean parliamentarians to ask how Russia can best support them.

Mr. Best said he believes firmly that the European Union, for various reasons, does have a central role to play as a catalyst for interaction and unity on the Korean Peninsula.

Baroness Verma emphasized that trust from the EU alone is not enough. Trust needs to be established on all sides in order to go forward.

Dr. Balcomb said that Korea, though small, is now powerful enough to erase doubts of becoming a bargaining chip for greater national powers. It's apparent that there is support for North-South Korean unity from the European Union. Listening to the voices of Korea is the next step to reaching the goal of unity on the Korean Peninsula.

