

IAYSP ILC - Session VII: Youth's Contribution to Peace on the Korean Peninsula

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July 29, 2021

The image shows two promotional posters for the IAYSP ILC Session VII. The left poster is titled "Imagining a Unified World: The Youth's Contribution to Peace on the Korean Peninsula" and features a map of the Korean Peninsula with various icons representing youth activities like sports, art, and environmental work. The right poster is titled "Session VII: Imagining a Unified World: The Youth's Contribution to Peace on the Korean Peninsula" and lists the speakers, moderator, and closing remarks.

Speakers

- Mrs. Ju-hee Um
Member of IAYSP Korea, Unius Project for a peaceful reunification in Korea, South Korea
- Mr. Andrei Litvinov
Founder of Ethnic Korean Kids Center and of "Culture DNA". Teacher in Senal for foreign students, article writer in Segye Ilbo Newspaper, Ukraine

Moderator

- Mrs. Mélanie Komagata
Graduate student in East Asian studies, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Closing

- Mrs. Jeonghye Hassinen
Secretary General, IAYSP Europe & Middle East, Austria

July 29th, 2021
10:00-11:30 (CET)
<https://upf-ilc.eu/>

Registration: session7.july.upf-ilc.eu

Links to Video:

vimeo.com/580691315
youtu.be/p2Cm4eX7Ppc

Family Church

The series of webinars of the July 2021 International Leadership Conference (ILC) was held online from July 27th to 29th, 2021 on the topic of "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Best Practices in Track II Diplomacy." Its seventh session entitled "Imagining a Unified World: The Youth's Contribution to Peace on the Korean peninsula", took place on July 29th and was co-hosted by UPF and IAYSP (International Association of Youth and Students for Peace) Europe and Middle East. In this session, young panelists shared about projects and initiatives in the fields of sports, the arts, and the environment aimed at rapprochement and, ultimately, at the peaceful reunification of the Peninsula. Indeed, as the Korean peninsula has been divided for over 70 years, despite efforts for rapprochement and reunification. Now, the future of Korea and the world lies in the hands of the youth. Indeed, young people also have a great role together with the elder generation, in bringing about harmony between the two Koreas. However, as North and South Korea were divided by superpowers at the end of World War II, peace between them does not only concern and depend on the Korean people. It also concerns Europe, the whole world, and its youth. The generation of Koreans whose families were split apart by the Korean division are now much older. So, what is the significance of re-unification in the Korean peninsula for today's generation of young Koreans? And what does it mean for young people across the world? The panelists tackled those questions, looked at peace and unification from the perspective of the youth, and invited young people to act as peacemakers in Korea and throughout the world.

Report

The session began with a brief explanation of the history of the division of Korea, given by the moderator, Mrs. Mélanie Komagata, a UPF intern, member of the committee of IAYSP-Switzerland, currently completing her graduate degree in East Asian Studies. She continued with an introduction on what has been done so far by the youth for peace on the Korean peninsula and around the world. Young people have used their talents and skills, in sports, art, and culture notably, to bring about a harmony and peace. Here are some examples that were stated: in art and culture, the Little Angels Dance Troupe performed in North Korea in 1998 and touched the heart of the audience. The same exchange happened the other way around, as a dance troupe of young North Koreans performed in Seoul in 2000; Furthermore, sports is what unites the spirit of athletes and their supporters despite division. Indeed, several times in history, a unified team of a divided country has competed together at the world championships. This happened with the two Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, as well with North and South Korea, starting with the unified Korean team at the World Table Tennis Championships in 1991, where the Women's Team won the gold medal. When the athletes had to separate after the tournament, it brought attention to the heartbreak of division between the Koreans. At the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, athletes of the two Koreas marched together under the unified flag during the opening ceremony. A video was shown to encourage young people to contribute in their own way and field of passion, to peace and harmony. This gave great context for the talks of our guest speakers.

The first speaker, Mrs. Ju-hee Um of IAYSP Korea and member of UniUS, a project towards the reunification of the Korean peninsula, was introduced with a video created by the UniUS team. Entitled 'A Letter from a Unified Future', it focused on the perspective of Korean citizens in a future unified Korea, sharing their gratitude to the people of the past who contributed to peace and the reunification on the Korean peninsula. This project won the Grand Prize of the 1st 2020 Peace and Unification Video Contest, and the first prize of the Minister of Unification Award that was directly awarded by the Prime Minister. Mrs. Ju-hee Um then explained that the division between North and South Korea is an ideological one, between communism and democracy, and therefore is politically complicated. However, the relationship between the people of both North and South Korea doesn't have to be so difficult. She emphasized the slogan: "Peace Starts with Me". A sentiment to the fact that every individual has a role to play in re-unification. Rather than leaving it up to leaders, we can all take our own initiatives by using our skills and talents, by joining an NGO, or by giving out donations to organizations that contribute to peace. Even small actions can have a huge impact on one person's life, and we shouldn't underestimate that. She emphasized the importance of each and everyone's investment with the motto "Little drops of water make the mighty ocean".

The second speaker was Mr. Andrei Litvinov from Ukraine, currently living in Korea with his Korean wife and five children. He is the founder of the Ethnic Korean Kids Center and of the online Korean language school named "Culture DNA". He is also a teacher at Senal school for foreign students. Through his intervention, Mr. Litvinov brought the perspective of non-Koreans to reunification. From an outsider's perspective, you may think that the two Koreas are worlds apart from each other. In fact, they share a common history of nearly 5000 years, the division is only very recent, relatively speaking. We tend to see South Korea as a success story through its Kpop idols, the K-dramas, and companies such as Samsung, and tend to alienate the North Korean people. But as Mrs. Ju-hee Um said, the division is not between people but ideologies. Therefore, the society needs to shift its perspective of the North Korean people and recognize the need for unification. Furthermore, he mentioned the family portrait of Korea is quite sad. Families were divided after the Korean War. As young citizens of the world, we need to show care about others, and not just "talk a lot, as it is now time for action".

Mr. Litvinov recognized that Korean culture is popular amongst foreigners now, and how performing arts and sports can help shift our perspectives. Furthermore, he emphasized that regular people in this way can change the world. Young people especially, having grown up in the age of social media, and have witnessed everyday people become influencers and activists. We need to be intentional about how we use our influence, and why not use it bring about peace? We furthermore need to keep in mind that "we [foreigners] brought tanks on the Korean peninsula and now, [it is our responsibility] to bring peace" in Korea.

The last speaker, Mrs. Jeong Hye Hassinen, currently Secretary General and former President of IAYSP Europe and Middle East, is half Japanese and half Korean. She is married to a half German, half Finnish man and currently lives in Austria with him. She shared with the audience the belief that we live in an age where borders are less and less significant, we are therefore all global world citizens. That is why it pains her to think that her own country is still divided. She admitted that practically, financially and politically, unification will be hard. But ultimately it will be beneficial on a global scale. If we can shift our focus from immediate, self-centered gain, to the greater good, looking past ideological differences, we will see how important unification is. Only when we can all see it this way will it be feasible. In this sense, leaders alone cannot achieve unification, not even the Korean people alone. We all need to be involved. Ultimately, it is also a matter of values. These days Koreans place a lot of importance on academic success and economic growth. Korean culture originally placed a lot of value on family and strength in connection. Nevertheless, still around half of high school students believe that reunification is necessary. If we can remember our values, on a worldwide level, then we can achieve reunification in our lifetimes. Furthermore, as there is no Holiday that is celebrated by the whole, not even Christmas Day or New Year, Mrs. Jeong Hye Hassinen proposed that the day of the reunification of Korea become a worldwide celebrated holiday, representing world peace.

To conclude, the young panelists encouraged the youth to take responsibility and action, to care for our world and for Korea, and to therefore invest themselves for peace in their own way, by using for example their talent and skills in their field of passion, or by engaging themselves by giving out donation to associations that contribute to peace, or by joining such an organization. As Mr. Litvinov stated it, "it is now time for action".

(This Webinar had 124 live participants and was viewed by about 551 people on Facebook)