

## **Opening remarks at the Korea Conference 2015**

Dear Friends, Dear sisters and brothers,

I'm happy that all of us - from different parts of the world - come together here.

A hearty welcome!

What we have in common is that all of us love the Korean People. In our love and concern we make no distinction between North and South. Sometimes I try to imagine how God is looking upon the people living in the southern and in the northern part of this beautiful country. And I pray: Help me to look with your eyes.

Since the situation is so complex, we need a lot of sincerity and simplicity. I'm often reminded of Phil 2, 3: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves". I pray and hope that God's spirit is with us and gives us this humility and utter openness for each other so that we can discuss all the matters with creativity in order to do the next steps. Only this spirit of openness will guide us in order to overcome the barriers.

We are together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to which the WCC has called us. This conference is a small contribution of German Churches and Institutions towards this pilgrimage.

In Germany as well as in East Asia we celebrated and we remembered this year the End of World War II 70 years ago. For both, for Korea and for Germany, it was the same year when division started. The German division was a result of the crimes German people committed in so many countries. The Korean people - as all of us know - had been under Japanese colonial rule and were divided. They became the first victims of the new antagonistic order of the world and the Korean War was the first proxy war, the first hot war in the times of global cold war. Today Germany is united but I very clearly say that the old East - West Conflict and the cold war era are only over when the Korean people are united as well.

As a German I want to remind the German churches and society that we, living in a country which has been united 25 years ago, have a historic obligation to remember the tragic division of the Korean people and to walk along with them as they strive for Reconciliation and Peace.

Let's have a look on the Agenda of this meeting.

Peace on the Korean peninsula, peace in East Asia and World peace are closely interrelated. This is the theme of this morning and we will have a look at the often vested interests of the superpowers which surround the Korean peninsula.

In the second part of this morning, we will listen to the experiences of people who lived in the DPRK or who visited recently.

In the afternoon, we will share some of the insights we - as representatives of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula - gained during our recent visit. We will inform each other about initiatives members of the Ecumenical Forum are undertaking and will reflect about these activities and the whole process especially from the perspective of the young people present among us.

Later in the afternoon, we will hear and discuss about some of the lessons we might learn from the German reunification having in mind that there are so many differences between the Korean and the German situation.

And in the evening, we will turn to God because sometimes I feel that I'm quite helpless and that a miracle is necessary to overcome all the obstacles lying on our way towards reconciliation and at least peaceful coexistence. We will have a special prayer around the cross as it is done every Friday at the Taizé Community. There we can get reassured that Christ crucified is sharing the pain of the still divided Korean people. And there we can – if we want by kneeling besides the cross - or in silent prayer renew our commitment to follow Christ's footsteps on our pilgrimage.

On the second day, we will share and discuss the expectation and the hope we have and we will reflect on very concrete steps we can go as individuals, as churches, as Ecumenical Forum and will close with a short devotion.

One last word: we have invited young people and we decided to give them space to make their own contributions to this conference, because we need them, their insights and their creativity in order to move forward.

May God bless us on our journey on our pilgrimage during the next two days!

Lutz Drescher, [drescher@ems-online.org](mailto:drescher@ems-online.org).