

IF IT TAKES LIES TO START A WAR -- ONLY TRUTH CAN END IT

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Student activists in Woolsan celebrate the coming reunification of Korea

After fifty-one years, a state of war still exists on the Korean peninsula, dividing a country that traces its history back over 5000 years; a country that prides itself on being the cultural seat of Asian civilization. There is a strong movement within that country to re-assert its independence from foreign domination and unite under its own terms.

The Korea Truth Commission is conducting a tribunal in New York City on the 23rd of June, 2001, wherein testimony will be heard that will expose the

historical truth of the repressive and brutal origins of a wholly artificial state of separation under a tattered flag of truce.

This is a brief account of a mission to become familiar with the current situation in Korea, meet jurists and a few victims and survivors with the courage to testify; and see, for ourselves, evidence of human rights abuses past and present.

On the 5th of March, 2001, I arrived in Seoul South Korea. I was honored to be the Veterans For Peace representative to a delegation of the Korea Truth Commission (KTC). As a veteran of the Korean war, I had a special interest in doing what I could to help illuminate truths that could heal wounds still gaping after more than fifty years, and unite this sundered country. We were a small delegation, composed of Brian Becker, co-founder, with Former U. S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, of the International Action Center, Gloria La Riva, award-winning documentary producer and also a member of the IAC, and myself. We were led by Kiyul Chung, a U.S. citizen of Korean extraction and top organizer of the KTC.

The Korea Truth Commission was formed last May in Beijing, by social justice, human rights and peace organizations from both (north and south) Koreas and representatives from overseas Korean communities throughout the world, to conduct a full, scientific and objective investigation of war crimes committed by the U.S. military and its client, the government of South Korea.

It has chapters in both Koreas and several overseas chapters in U.S., Canada, Japan, Europe, and China and maintains an office in Washington, D.C.

We Meet the Organizers

Several Korean political organizations are involved in the process of bringing to light the historical facts that have defined Korea as it is today. They are combined under an umbrella organization known as the **National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea (NADRK)**.

NADRK National Chairman, Oh Jong-Ryul, retired teacher and former political prisoner, and his deputy, Ahn Seung Uhan, were the first to officially greet our delegation. From them we learned something of the scope of the movement and the dedication of the people involved.



Oh Jong-Ryul, NADRK Leader

We meet the Jurists

We met two of the eminently-qualified and distinguished people who will sit as jurists during the Tribunal to be held in New York City this coming June:

Mr. Pyang, former Republic of Korea (ROK) Constitutional Court Justice (same as U.S. Supreme Court) and Mr. Kang Chul Sun, former Chief Prosecutor for the Republic of Korea (ROK) and a former legislator.

I was impressed, not only with their credentials, but with their courage to participate in a process that will illuminate the repressive roles played by their own government, and mine, since 1945. It takes courage, in Korea, to contradict official policies.

Testimony - Prisoners of Conscience

We met men and women who served long prison sentences, up to 33 years, mostly in solitary confinement, without heat in winter or cooling in summer, for holding beliefs contrary to those sanctioned by their government.

They spoke of the oppressive conditions imposed on free speech by the U.S. formulated National Security Act enacted by the ROK government in 1948. It appears to embrace all of the most egregiously-



Kim Yong-Son & Lee Gong-Lin – demonstrate outside Myung Dong Cathedral Sanctuary for political fugitives in Seoul

repressive elements of McCarthyism, making seditious acts of statements favorable to North Korea's government, or just the country itself. That such an anachronistic law could have survived to this day is additional testimony, in my opinion, to the hypocritical U.S. tolerance of citizen-repression by client states.



Lim Bang Kyu – 33 years in prison

Old men with quiet voices, like Mr. Chang Hyun Kim (80), Mr. Lim Bang Kyu (67), Mr. Lee Yng-Son, Mr. Kwon Nak K- and Mr. Song Kay Chae, described their tiny cells, too small to fully stretch their bodies, unheated, cold in winter, hot in summer, isolated from other prisoners. They were frequently tortured. They said they were able to maintain

sanity by constant study and a powerful determination to be true to themselves and the ideal of a united Korea.

There were many more who could not physically withstand their treatment and died while still in prison. Only 94 out of 700 long-term (over 17 years) prisoners have survived imprisonment.

Hwang Sun, knowingly invited arrest and imprisonment by spending three months in North Korea. When we met her, she had just finished serving a two-year prison sentence. Her demeanor was also humble and iron-willed.

These men and women are quiet models of humility and strength of purpose.

Testimony - Massacre Survivors

They came to give public testimony, after fifty years of silence, in a meeting room of the National Assembly in Seoul. They have been encouraged by the warming of relationships between North and South since last June's visit to North Korea by ROK President, Kim Dae Jung.

A succession of speakers, survivors and activists seeking truth and reunification, gave the results of investigations to-date. For example:



Delegation with survivors

Of approximately 3 million people killed, 2 million were civilians; more massacres committed by South Korean and U.S. forces than North Korean forces (none by Chinese forces); evidence of a U.S. military policy of considering all Koreans "the enemy" on the basis that distinguishing between friend and foe was impossible.

Two old women removed their shoes and socks to show horribly mutilated feet; the result of strafing and bombing attacks on their villages.

We listened to graphic descriptions of massive political prisoner massacres, such as the one near Taegu at an abandoned Cobalt mine, where 3500 were killed and tossed down a mineshaft, some still alive when covered by earth.

We learned of the 80,000 killed on the Island of Cheju for resisting the division of Korea and the formation of the U.S. sponsored South Korean government of Syngman Rhee.

While these massacres were carried out by the South Korean National Police and the ROK army, under Rhee, the U.S. military command was aware they were taking place and even, by report, had observers present at some sites.

Testimony – Labor Leaders

They live in a tent, on a parking lot owned by the Nandong Catholic Church, near where they used to work, at the Daewoo plant in Inchon. They dare not leave this sanctuary, because their pictures are prominently displayed everywhere on a "Wanted Poster" as violators of the National Security Act (NSA). Their offense? Wanting to go back to work at Daewoo.



Kim Yong-Son and Hwang Sun, fellow prisoners of conscience.



They cannot, because Daewoo is in the process of being sold to General Motors for a fraction of its value, and cutbacks are part of the preparation for sale. These people believe their government is sacrificing Korean workers to an inhumane version of capitalism, that puts maximized profits ahead of the health of a national economy.

The day we visited them, 200 workers had been arrested and jailed for attempting to reclaim their jobs. While 1700 remaining workers labor on inside the fences, 3000 armed riot police monitor every entrance.

These young leaders are well aware that one day they will have to leave the compound. They know their action has guaranteed certain prison sentences under the NSA.

Testimony – Student Leaders

Would anyone have believed that students elected to leadership positions by their fellow students would automatically become wanted criminals – again, under the draconian National Security Act? They live in small utility rooms on campus, where they organize protests and demonstrations against the U.S. military presence in their country and for the re-unification of North and South.

They dare not leave the university, which grants them sanctuary, for fear the police, who wait patiently at the gates, will arrest them and send them to prison. They accept their positions knowing the inevitability of prison.



Student Body president, Ulan University

Massacre Site Visited -- Victims Honored

A jumbled mix of loose rocks and bones and skulls mark the location, deep within a mountain, where 3500 political prisoners were executed in 1948 and tossed into a mine shaft. We were told, that toward the end of that grisly procedure, which went on for



days, the South Korean National Police ran short of bullets and resorted to tying prisoners into seven-member groups, shooting one and letting his falling body pull the rest into the shaft. Those still alive, died slowly of suffocation as more bodies poured down upon them and were finally sealed away from history by tons of earth.



We gave homage to those who died, in a ceremony on the side of the mountain, near where most remain buried from sight, but no longer from mind.

Closing the Circle

This writer, against all expectations, in a remarkable turn of fate, found himself standing upon a platform amidst a sea of humanity, in downtown Taegu, where forty-nine years before I had walked the streets as an Air Policeman on town patrol.

I was facing, with my companions, a dedicated band of Korean Activists intent upon bringing the truth of their own history to a largely ignorant Korean public. With microphone in hand, and a big –lunged speaker at my side, I joined with others to voice my own conviction that the Korean people should be free to determine the fate of their own country, to re-unite with their families in the North, to be rid of the baleful U.S. military presence in their midst that festers as the ultimate expression of U.S. arrogance toward a people who have a universally-recognized right to be free of foreign occupation.



The passing public read posters depicting massacres and human rights abuses that have been visited upon their parents, their neighbors, perhaps even themselves, for over fifty years. They read the stories, examine the pictures with interest, then with horror.

I knew that many, like many of us in the U.S., would put those images out of their minds and go on. But some will not. Some will want to know more about their heritage, the true history of their country. They will ask questions. They will become part of a movement that is growing stronger and more vocal every day.

Wilson Powell is co-author, with Zhou Ming-fu, of “Two Walk The Golden Road”; the interwoven true-life stories of two enemy soldiers of the Korean War. You may visit their website at: <http://www.goldnroad.com/>