

Seoul Friends Meeting, South Korea: Example of a Meeting with a Leading

By David Hartsough

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I just returned from a trip to Korea and Vietnam. I was deeply inspired by the Seoul Friends Meeting which have taken a concern very seriously, and as a whole Meeting become actively involved in working corporately and in a sustained way on that concern.

Background: Jeju island is off the southern coast of South Korea. **B**etween 30,000 and 80,000 people from the island were assassinated by the Korean military back in 1948 before the Korean war started under orders of the US military command which occupied South Korea at that time. Whole villages were burned and all inhabitants killed. Anyone who challenged the US desire to build a strongly anti-communist South Korea and divide the country between North and South were considered subversive and communist sympathizers therefore deserving to be killed. One/third of the population of Jeju Island were killed at that time including many women and children..

Here are some of the things the Seoul Friends Meeting is doing:

1. The whole Meeting went to Jeju island, about 300 miles from Seoul, and worshiped at the main gate of the Base sharing their deep concern that the massive new military base not be built.
2. Supported their member Oh Chul-geun spiritually and financially who went to Jeju island and prayerfully carried out the “three-steps-one-prostration” march (take three steps and then prostrate once and repeat – the first step signifies repentance of human selfishness and avarice, the second step compassion and consolation for all mortal living things, the third step a vow to save nature and all living things, and the prostration a prayer to realize the repentance and vow expressed in the three steps). He did the march 5 hours daily for five hundred days over a three-year period.
3. Sent three of their Members to accompany me – an American Friend from San Francisco Friends Meeting in support of the courageous villagers of Gangjeong, and activists from all parts of South Korea who have come to Jeju island to support the villagers in their effort to nonviolently stop the building of this massive base which could be a flashpoint for another major war

between the US and China. Korean Catholics daily conduct a Mass while blocking the gate to the base where hundreds of bulldozers and cement trucks enter each day building the military port. I was so moved by the deep prayer of the people participating in the Mass and nonviolent blockade that I felt led to join them. (foto)

4. Two of the members of the Meeting have bought homes on Jeju Island to be closer to the base and help support the nonviolent resistance there.
5. Supported one of the members of the Meeting, Haeng Woo Lee, who is organizing a series of conferences with participants from both government and civil society sectors (academics, former government officials, experts from think tanks, representatives from civil society groups and others) from South Korea, North Korea, the US, Japan, China, Russia and Germany. The hope is that they will get to know one another, hear one another's concerns and viewpoints and hopefully help North and South Korea and the US move away from military confrontation and war towards a negotiated and peaceful resolution of their differences.

I was deeply inspired by this Faithful Witness by the Seoul Friends Meeting. They live in a hotspot left over from the Cold War and McCarthyism, and understand deeply the danger of another war on the Korean peninsula which could easily become a nuclear war engulfing not only North and South Korea, but the US and China.

Martin Luther King once said that "the United States is the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world". The US has fought endless wars in other people's countries – Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and so many other places and has more than one thousand military bases in countries around the world. Drones are flying over many countries unleashing death on many civilians as well as the "militants" who are being targeted. We Friends in the US don't feel so deeply the pain and suffering of all these wars and militarism since for most of us, these wars are far away and we don't know personally the people who are being killed or forced to flee their homes, or those being tortured at Guantanamo, and thus we don't feel the urgency to act corporately to stop all this madness. Seoul Friends meeting was a wake up call for me about what is possible when a Friends Meeting feels deeply the pain of war and acts corporately and strongly to Speak Truth to Power and act together with other people of conscience from other parts of their country to stop the preparations for more wars and the building of one more massive military base which could be a flashpoint for another terrible war that could bring death to millions or even hundreds of millions of God's children.

I hope and pray that our Friends Meetings in the US can feel inspired by the Friends in Korea and find ways to act corporately and powerfully to help encourage our government to not only respect the will of the people of Gangjeong village on Jeju Island and stop the building of the military base there, but to step back from the Pax Americana way of relating to the rest of the world and work toward “Shared Security”, not national security, which is really no security at all – either for us or for people around the world.

For a longer report of David’s trip to Korea and Vietnam, see

www.peaceworkersus.org/news/war-and-peace-in-korea-and-vietnam-2014/

See the AFSC/FCNL document on Shared Security

<http://sharedsecurity.wordpress.com/>

To learn more about the growing world-wide movement to end all war in which many Friends are involved, see www.worldbeyondwar.org

And for more on the movement to stop the building of the military base on Jeju Island, see www.savejejunow.org

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