

# Unification Church and North Korea

The Unification Church has had a complex relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). The North Korean government imprisoned and exiled Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, along with other religious figures. The church opposed the North's alliance with communism, but later promoted economic cooperation between North and South.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 1 Background

Sun Myung Moon, the founder and leader of the Unification Church, was born on 25 February 1920, in modern-day North P'yŏng'an Province, North Korea during the time when Korea was under Japanese rule.<sup>[2]</sup> Hak Ja Han, Moon's widow and present leader of the church, was also born in North Korea.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the 1940s Moon cooperated with Communist Party members in the Korean independence movement against Imperial Japan.<sup>[4]</sup> After the defeat of Japan (in the Second World War) in 1945, Korea was divided between Soviet and American occupation forces. In 1948 the Republic of Korea was established in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north, usually referred to as South Korea and North Korea.<sup>[5]</sup> The government of North Korea followed Stalinist policies and sought to discourage free religious activities.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 1946, Moon was living in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea.<sup>[7]</sup> Pyongyang was the center of Christian activity in Korea until 1945. From the late forties 166 priests and other religious figures were killed or disappeared in concentration camps, including Francis Hong Yong-ho, bishop of Pyongyang<sup>[8]</sup> and all monks of Tokwon abbey.<sup>[9]</sup> No Catholic priest survived the persecution, all churches were destroyed and the government never allowed any foreign priest to set up in North Korea.<sup>[10]</sup> Moon was arrested by the North Korean authorities on allegations of spying for South Korea and given a five-year sentence to the Hŭngnam labor camp.<sup>[2]</sup> In 1950, during the Korean War, he escaped and fled to Pusan, South Korea.<sup>[11]</sup>

## 2 Cold War era

In 1954, Moon formally founded the Unification Church as the "Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity" in Seoul.<sup>[2][12]</sup> Moon's teachings

were strongly anti-communist and viewed the Cold War between democracy and communism as the final conflict between God and Satan, with divided Korea as its primary front line.<sup>[13]</sup>

Soon after its founding the Unification Church began supporting anti-communist organizations, including the World League for Freedom and Democracy founded in 1966 in Taipei, Republic of China (Taiwan), by Chiang Kai-shek,<sup>[14]</sup> and the Korean Culture and Freedom Foundation, an international public diplomacy organization which also sponsored Radio Free Asia.<sup>[15]</sup> In 1975 Moon spoke at a government sponsored rally against potential North Korean military aggression on Yeouido Island in Seoul to an audience of around 1 million.<sup>[16]</sup>

In 1976 the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, a committee of the United States House of Representatives, conducted an investigation into South Korea–United States relations including Unification Church support of South Korean interests during the regime of Park Chung-hee.<sup>[17][18]</sup>

In the 1980s the Unification Church's other anticommunist activities included: CAUSA International, an anti-communist educational organization based in New York City and active in Latin America;<sup>[19]</sup> the Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, a Washington D.C. think tank that underwrites conservative-oriented research and seminars at Stanford University, the University of Chicago, and other institutions;<sup>[20]</sup> and *The Washington Times* newspaper, which promoted the policies of Ronald Reagan.<sup>[21]</sup> Bo Hi Pak, who had been an officer in the South Korean army during the Korean War, was the founding president and the founding chairman of the board of *The Washington Times*.<sup>[22]</sup>

## 3 Post-Soviet era

In the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union was embarking on political and economic reform, it began demanding payment from North Korea for past and current aid — amounts North Korea could not repay.<sup>[23]</sup> With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, trade between the two countries ceased altogether and the North Korean economy collapsed. Without Soviet aid, the flow of inputs to the North Korea agricultural sector ended, and the government proved too inflexible to respond.<sup>[24]</sup> As a result, food production decreased precipitously.<sup>[25][26]</sup>

By 1994 the North Korean famine was underway.<sup>[27]</sup> Estimates of the death toll vary widely. Out of a total population of approximately 22 million, somewhere between 240,000 and 3,500,000 people died from starvation or hunger-related illnesses, with the deaths peaking in 1997.<sup>[28][29]</sup> Initial assistance to North Korea started as early as 1990, with small-scale support from religious groups in South Korea and assistance from UNICEF.<sup>[30]</sup> In August 1995, North Korea made an official request for humanitarian aid and the international community responded accordingly, including South Korea, the United States, Japan, and China.<sup>[31]</sup>

In 1991 Moon travelled to North Korea to meet with its president, Kim Il-sung.<sup>[32]</sup> In 1992 Kim gave his first and only interview with the Western news media to *Washington Times* reporter Josette Sheeran (who later became Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme).<sup>[33]</sup> In 1994, Moon was officially invited to Kim's funeral, in spite of the absence of diplomatic relations between North Korea and South Korea.<sup>[34]</sup>

In 1998, Unification Church-related businesses launched operations in North Korea with the approval of the government of South Korea, which had prohibited business relationships between North and South before.<sup>[35]</sup> In 2000, the church-associated business group Tongil Group founded Pyeonghwa Motors in the North Korean port of Nampo, in cooperation with the North Korean government. It was the first automobile factory in North Korea.<sup>[36]</sup>

During the presidency of George W. Bush, Dong Moon Joo, a Unification Church member and then president of *The Washington Times*, undertook unofficial diplomatic missions to North Korea in an effort to improve its relationship with the United States.<sup>[37]</sup> Joo was born in North Korea and is a citizen of the United States.<sup>[38]</sup>

In 2003, Korean Unification Church members started a political party in South Korea. It was named "The Party for God, Peace, Unification and Home". In its inauguration declaration, the new party said it would focus on preparing for Korean reunification by educating the public about God and peace.<sup>[39]</sup> Moon was a member of the Honorary Committee of the Unification Ministry of the Republic of Korea.<sup>[40]</sup> Church member Jae-jung Lee was a Unification Minister of the Republic of Korea.<sup>[41]</sup>

In 2010 in Pyongyang, to mark the 20th anniversary of Moon's visit to Kim Il-sung, *de jure* President Kim Yong-nam hosted Moon's son Hyung Jin Moon, then the president of the Unification Church, in his official residence.<sup>[42][43]</sup> At that time, Hyung Jin Moon donated 600 tons of flour to the children of Jeongju, the birthplace of Sun Myung Moon.<sup>[44][45]</sup>

In 2012 Moon was posthumously awarded North Korea's National Reunification Prize.<sup>[46]</sup> On the first anniversary of Moon's death, North Korean president Kim Jong-un expressed condolences to Han and the family saying: "Kim Jong-un prayed for the repose of Moon,

who worked hard for national concord, prosperity and reunification and world peace."<sup>[47]</sup>

## 4 See also

- Unification Church political activities

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