

February 25, 2019

Good morning. It is my great pleasure to participate in this historic event on behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance. I want to thank all the organizing partners for inviting me to give a brief welcome.

As secretary general of the World Evangelical Alliance, I lead a global network that serves the estimated 600 million evangelicals around the world today. We thank God for the amazing work that he has done in Korea. Your growth and faithfulness have been a great inspiration to all of us. Over the last 50 years, no country has exhibited both economic development and expansion of the Gospel more impressively than South Korea.

I first visited Korea 30 years ago. I came mainly to learn from your example of dedication to prayer and your success in church growth. But I also visited the Canaan Farmers School. There I learned the amazing story of Elder Kim Yong-ki and his determination, as a young man living under the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1931, to put four values into practice: love of God, love of country, hard work, and self-discipline.

Like the Christians who played such a prominent role in the March First Independence Movement that we commemorate this weekend, Elder Kim espoused creative, nonviolent forms of resistance. Since the Japanese occupiers often seized Korean farmers' crops, Elder Kim encouraged them to plant sweet potatoes, which he knew the Japanese would not take. Then he developed underground refrigeration capacity so that local farmers could store their sweet potatoes for up to a year. Elder Kim's leadership in agricultural development and training made him a national inspiration. President Park Chung-hee visited the Canaan Farmers School in 1962 and sent many members of his administration to learn from Elder Kim during the 1960s.

Of course, Elder Kim was not the first Christian to play an influential role in Korea. Nearly half the 33 signers of the March First declaration were Christians, even though Korea was only about 1.5% Christian at the time. I believe that the Holy Spirit prepared them for this act. A series of revivals in the early twentieth century inspired Korean Christians to resist both the theological and political implications of Japanese colonialism. Although Christian missionary organizations were understandably reluctant to offend the Japanese and tended to avoid politics, Korean Christians exhibited great indigenous leadership. Long before Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Koreans displayed nonviolent resistance in a bold, principled manner.

Today, we see the impact of Korean Christians' commitment to love of God, love of country, hard work, and self-discipline. South Korea is the shining light of Asian Christianity and a beacon to the world, sending more missionaries than any country except the United States. Your large churches, particularly Yoido Full Gospel Church, are world-famous. So is your sense of community, as remarkably illustrated by the donations that Koreans made to their government in 1998 during the Asian financial crisis.

You have also wonderfully maintained a spirit of nonviolence despite the division between the two Koreas. On my first visit to Korea, I also went to Panmunjon and wept before God in prayer, asking him to bring lasting peace and reunification to this divided peninsula. I continue to ask earnestly God to make this happen even as I advocate for reunification when I meet with leaders from both the north and south sides of the Demilitarized Zone.

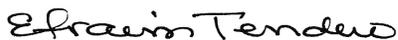
As we reach the 100th anniversary of March 1, 1919, we have much to celebrate regarding God's work in Korea. But we also have serious threats to address. Territorial colonization is a thing of the past, but in our age of globalization, today's "colonizers" use economic or cultural means to exert worldwide influence.

History has shown that diligence leads to affluence, but that affluence undermines diligence. Korea is now experiencing the second part of that cycle. Probably your most famous global export today is not technology or cars but K-pop. I am not trying to criticize K-pop! I understand that some Koreans are using K-pop as a tool for sharing the Gospel. But in Korea as elsewhere, affluence and pop culture can distract us, especially young people, from their need for the gospel. We need to present living for Christ as the most fulfilling, life-enhancing decision in a world that offers many other choices.

We also need to recapture our unity in Christ. One of the most striking facts about Korean Christianity is that you have 100 different Presbyterian denominations! I asked someone what TongHap Presbyterian and HapDong Presbyterian mean, and he told me that both mean "United Presbyterian." How ironic. The World Evangelical Alliance seeks to have one national affiliate in each country, but in South Korea we have a divided Council of Churches. Pursuing Christian unity does not require us to merge our separate organizations, but we must not let secondary differences in doctrine or personality override our primary purpose. Jesus said that others will know we are Christians by our love, not our internal debates.

The cooperation of so many Christian groups and other organizations in holding this event shows that you can indeed come together with a shared purpose, that you treasure the legacy of those who came before you in Korea, and that you care about continuing the great history of Korean Christianity for the next 100 years. It is a great privilege to be with you today, and I look forward to seeing how God will work through you to reach the world in the upcoming years. God bless the great nation of Korea.

Sincerely,



BISHOP EFRAIM M. TENDERO

Secretary General/CEO

World Evangelical Alliance