

Korean church groups commemorate independence declaration

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March 1, 2011

Tokyo, March 1 (ENInews)--North and South Korean Protestant church groups have held their first simultaneous worship services to commemorate a declaration of independence on 1 March, 1919 from Japanese colonial rule.

The worship services were held in each country on Sunday, 27 February. The service on the South Korean side was held by the Committee on Reconciliation and Unification of the National Council of Churches in Korea in Seoul. Approximately 180 people attended the service, the council said.

The 1919 declaration was made in Seoul by 33 Korean religious leaders and laypersons of the independence movement. However, the movement was suppressed by Japan until the end of the Second World War on 15 August, 1945, when colonial rule, which had begun in 1910, ended.

In a joint statement on 27 February, the Rev. Young Ju Kim, general secretary of the Seoul-based National Council of Churches in Korea and the Rev. Young Sup Kang, chairperson of the Pyongyang-based Korean Christian Federation, made a number of statements of concern about recent moves by Japan.

"We [are] angry at and are deeply concerned about the entry into Pusan port [on the southern coast of South Korea] by Japanese Aegis fleet and the expression of consideration of possible dispatch of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces by the Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan," the statement said.

They urged the Japanese government to "keep its [war-renouncing Article 9 of its] peace constitution, promptly stop worshipping at the Yasukuni Shrine [a Tokyo war shrine where spirits of the war dead are enshrined] and teach next generations with right historical textbooks."

They also declared that the Japanese territorial claim over Dokdo island, or the Liancourt Rocks that are known as Takeshima Island in Japanese and is a group of small islets in the sea area in dispute between South Korea and Japan, is "not affordable."

"We urge the Japanese government to justly compensate for the so-called 'the drafted comfort women' and the forced military draftees by Japan and not to discriminate [against] Korean-Japanese and their descendants and treat them without discrimination [in the] same [way] as Japanese people," the statement concluded.

During the colonial period, Japan forced Korean women to act as sexual companions for the Japanese military and drafted many Koreans for war actions. The descendants of the first-generation Korean residents in Japan, many of whom were brought there for forced labour, say they have often been discriminated against.