

WCC urges Korea sanctions be lifted: Calls for restoration of humanitarian aid

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The World Council of Churches has appealed to the international community to help lift sanctions against North Korea and to restore humanitarian aid to defeat hunger and malnutrition in the country.

“The grave humanitarian crisis of hunger, chronic malnutrition and related disease facing the North Korean people are a challenge not only to the churches, but also to the conscience of the entire international community,” said the WCC executive committee after its late August meeting in Seoul, South Korea.

The Geneva-based World Council noted that churches and related agencies had addressed these problems before and helped prevent “a major catastrophe,” but it urged them to continue to deal with the humanitarian needs of the North Korean people.

South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun had, on August 24, expressed his appreciation to the WCC for its “fundamental assistance” in support of human rights and democratization in his country. He also welcomed the contribution of the churches to the promotion of peaceful reunification of divided Korea.

The WCC called on churches to mobilize support for the Six Party Talks, started in August of 2003. The six—South Korea, North Korea, Russia, Japan, China and the United States—“have agreed to work toward a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and most share the view that North Korea’s concern over its security must be given due consideration and resolved,” the WCC said.

Since a 1953 armistice in the Korean War, a number of nations have imposed both multilateral and bilateral diplomatic and trade sanctions against North Korea for its acts of internal oppression and nuclear armaments policies. Among those having

sanctions are the United States, Japan, South Korea and the European Union.

The WCC was critical of North Korea, expressing concern over reports it violated human rights and denied access to human rights organizations. At the same time, the WCC called on the U.S. not to take preemptive military action against North Korea nor to use nuclear weapons against it.

Earlier this year, the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs said the reunification of the Korean peninsula would be a major focus of its work in the run-up to the council's next assembly—its highest governing body—to be held in Brazil in 2006. *-Ecumenical News International*