

South Korean churches ask food aid for North Korea: Food shortage particularly tough on children

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A South Korean group of churches has been urging its member congregations and organizations to join a campaign to give North Korean children milk and bread “without any precondition.” The gestures came amid heightened political tensions on the Korean peninsula.

The National Council of Churches in Korea said it would mobilize its churches for “urgent support to people in North Korea in the situation of the present critical antagonistic political arrangement on the Korean peninsula.”

The council said the campaign is the result of discussions in Beijing last March with its North Korean counterpart, the Korean Christian Federation.

The campaign includes a Week of National Reconciliation in June that encouraged churches to have special worship services with prayers for the people of North Korea. Organizers plan to send large sacks of flour and thousands of cans of powdered milk.

Relations between North and South Korea have taken a turn for the worse in recent months. North Korea launched a long-range rocket April 5 and conducted a second nuclear test on May 25—actions that have led to tougher United Nations sanctions against the isolated totalitarian state.

“Any humanitarian assistance from South Korea has completely ceased because of the stringent relationship between the North and the South, and 330,000 tons of expected assistance from the U.S.A. was stopped” because of the nuclear situation, officials of the South Korean churches said.

The food shortage has been particularly tough on children, pregnant women and the elderly, they said. The undernourishment of North Korean children will cause “a

vicious circle, downgrading their physical growth as well as their ability to study.”

The South Korean council includes as members Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, evangelical and Eastern Orthodox church bodies, as well as the Salvation Army and the Assemblies of God. -*Religion News Service, Ecumenical News International*