

Korean churches say global prayers needed after military clash

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Tokyo, December 2 (ENInews)--The head of the Seoul-based National Council of Churches in Korea has urged global prayers during Advent for peace on the peninsula following a North Korean military attack on a South Korean island.

The council's newly-elected general secretary, the Rev. Kim Young-Ju, said he wanted the "prayer and solidarity of the worldwide churches" to help nurture peace.

Advent marks the period of the church year before Christmas and commemorates the coming of Jesus into the world.

Kim made his appeal in a 1 December statement on the council's Web site, which also urged North and South Korea to use only peaceful means to achieve reunification of the two countries that were divided after the Second World War.

He condemned the 23 November shelling by North Korea's military of Yeonpyeong island, which led to the deaths of four people. Kim also warned that South Korea's military exercises in the region may contribute to tension.

"Similar incidents would be happening for days to come if the North and the South depend only on military forces," said Kim. "Korean churches have to pray that mutual trust between the North and the South should be established."

In 1950, South Korea and a U.S.-led United Nations force fought against North Koreans backed by Chinese ground troops and aided by the Soviet Union. Hostilities came to a halt in an armistice signed at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953, but a formal ceasefire has yet to be signed.

In a 26 November statement, the NCKC had issued an "appeal to all nations to reject any attempt to cheapen life by treating Korea as a pawn in diplomatic gamesmanship, while ignoring the welfare of the people".

The church council has also requested global partners to urge governments, "to refrain from further inflaming the political atmosphere and to exercise the maximum restraint so that reason and diplomacy can prevail over narrow self-serving military, strategic or political interests".

The council said that it "deplores the North Korean military for using powerful weapons against the civilian community in the most serious incident since the signing of the armistice in 1953".

Separately, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, said in a statement that "force and military power will not resolve the problems" on the Korean peninsula.