

## The Vancouver Summit on North Korea - A Personal Perspective

NZ DPRK Society secretary Peter Wilson reflects the day after in Vancouver

January 17<sup>th</sup> 2018

The one day meeting of 20 foreign ministers from 'sender countries' plus friends has come and gone. It has barely created a ripple.

People in Vancouver certainly didn't take any notice and it is doubtful many people round the rest of the world have either.

They might have read a few headlines though. Such as Aljazeera's "*China, Russia not invited to summit on North Korea in Canada*". Newsweek's headline of the same day that North Korea may become a leading supplier of crystal meth following sanctions could well have got more publicity than the summit did. Headlines on the true issue – the need for a peace treaty to end the state of war - are non-existent. This, what is in fact the nub of the problem, does not appear to have been discussed at the Summit.

### An Exercise in Futility

Two weeks ago I put a commentary on our Society website which a few hundred people from around the globe have apparently now read. It was entitled "**Vancouver Group Meeting on North Korea - an Exercise in Futility**" and argued that: "*Instead of finding ways to increase pressure on North Korea, which can only lead to prolonged further tension, the Vancouver Group should be identifying ways to address North Korea's existential concerns. This means a "rolling back of the hostile policy" (of which sanctions are a part) and withdrawing "the nuclear threat of the US"*."

The article was prophetic, because the summit has indeed been an exercise in futility. Nineteen bootlicking nations have endorsed Tillerson's disingenuous "*peaceful pressure*" policy.

But it was not only the summit which was futile, the huge civil society effort put into trying to put across the message that direct dialogue and a peace treaty are the answers not sanctions and isolation, went unheard.

The diminutive human dynamo that is Christine Ahn, assisted by other women from around the world, put a powerful message before all of the delegates recommending an abandonment of maximum pressure, immediate unconditional dialogue by all parties and implementation of UN resolution 1325 encouraging participation of women in all stages of conflict resolution.

You can read the full statement here: <https://www.womencrossdmz.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Statement-Vancouver-Womens-Forum-Peace-Korea-FINAL.pdf>

In NZ I wrote what I felt to be a balanced and strong letter to our Foreign Minister Winston Peters in which I argued that nothing would be achieved by the Vancouver Group unless North Korea's legitimate security fears are recognized and steps taken to initiate the negotiating of a peace treaty. You can read the letter on: <https://sites.google.com/site/nzdprksociety/advocacy>

Although the Vancouver Group meeting was only announced four weeks earlier, 19 December, civil society responded with a full programme of seminars, forums, talks and street demonstrations timed to coincide with the so called summit. These events were organized by Women Cross DMZ, the United Church of Canada, the Nobel Women's

Initiative, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, the International League for Peace and Freedom and a Vancouver based peace activist NGO Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO).

I flew to Vancouver to take part.

### **Candlelight Vigil 15<sup>th</sup> January**

Some 60 people assembled 6.30 p.m. at the Vancouver Art Gallery and, led by a band of South Korean drummers, walked several blocks through the CBD streets to Jack Poole Plaza on the waterfront adjacent to the Canada Place Convention Centre - venue next day for what is now being referred to as the Summit Meeting. There were many impassioned speeches, mostly on the theme that all Koreans, North and South want peace, not war.

For the occasion, with the help of a lot of safety pins, I had draped a North Korean flag around my body, the white star prominent across the front. I felt proud that I could be a proxy representative of the DPRK, embraced in this candlelit atmosphere of peace, love and common sense.



As the speeches started I had placed myself to one side of the podium, just out of the spotlights, facing out to the crowd so that they could see the flag. Half a dozen or more media with cameras were in front of the podium filming the action. After a little while a Canadian ethnic Korean quietly asked me to stand aside because the media would be seen in South Korea and could cause trouble. As she was one of those who had organized the candle vigil and I was a visitor, out of respect, I wordlessly moved to the back of the crowd.

The flag, a symbol of North Korea is told to get lost at, of all places, a peace rally! This small incident made me reflect on how all North Koreans must feel, rejected as they are by the rest of the world in their artificially enforced isolation.

For the rest of the evening I wandered behind the cameras throughout the crowd and the peace banners. I encountered no animosity, doubtful glances from Canadian Koreans, and curious questions from others. The meeting wrapped up about 9.30 p.m. with a traditional Korean Maypole dance and the singing of 'We Shall Overcome'.

## **Picket line at the Convention Centre 16<sup>th</sup> January**

In the breaking dawn at 8a.m. about 30 people, predominately the 16 Women Cross DMZ team, assembled with assorted banners at the entrance to the Summit venue. I was once again draped in the North Korean flag. We hardly saw any delegates. Certainly not any of the big names – I guess they entered through the basement by car. It was only the little delegations from the small countries entering by the front doors and they did not have to walk through or anywhere near the picket line – which is what most of them chose to do.

Possibly reflecting NZ's naivety in the world at large, the only delegation I saw walk partially through the picket line was the one from NZ – Foreign Minister Winston Peters, surrounded by a bevy of MFAT people including Shee-Jeong Park, Lead Advisor N. E. Asia Division.

I yelled out "Kia ora Winston". He did a double take and, like the good people person politician he is, he walked over with a big grin all over his face and shook my hand. I told him my name, foolishly thinking he would recognize who I was. The grin went and he looked a bit puzzled. Of course he would not have been expecting anybody to have come here from New Zealand. His companions were looking a bit impatient. I was completely unprepared for this encounter, and not being very fast on my feet in such situations, instead of saying something like "advocate a peace treaty in there this morning!" I mumbled "good luck in there" which was rather lame! Shee-Jeong said hello, we shook hands and the two of them followed the others inside.

On the picket line that morning there were people from Canada, the USA, South Korea, Japan, Guam, Sweden and of course myself from NZ. It cost a lot of money and effort for us all to be there. While we all felt good about doing what we were doing, the impact was pretty close to zero. A few delegates were handed leaflets making the case for direct dialogue and a peace treaty, but most would have been unaware that there was any protest action.

### **Banner and Leaflet Action 1 p.m. busy CDB street.**

Meant to have been organized by StopWar.ca, somehow they did not even turn up. I got there at 1.30 to find a keen young fellow who has recently been appointed Korea Friendship Association (KFA) Canada representative. He was handing out anti war in Korea leaflets. Maybe one in ten took a leaflet. Helping him was middle aged long haired scruffy individual known as 'Bin Dougie' who told me he gets involved in all protests whatever they might be! I had seen him standing to one side the previous night holding up a 'Yankee Go Home' placard. During the evening somebody had complained about marijuana smoke drifting in from that direction.

### **Vancouver Women's Forum, Wosk Centre for dialogue 2 p.m.**

Attended by about 80 or maybe a few more people which included a smattering of males who were requested not to speak or ask questions, this had an overly ambitious programme which was split into three sessions:

1. Korean crisis in regional context
2. Why oppose sanctions? Understanding engagement and the human impact of hostilities against North Korea
3. Alternatives to war, Paths to peace

Each session had a moderator and four speakers, some of whom had a relevant message and made some good points, but others really were a waste of time.

No doubt a lot of what was said was new for many people. I learnt some new stuff too. Canada's vaunted Feminist Foreign Policy sounds great, but is not being implemented and has no budget support. Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland held in very low regard,

seemingly by everybody there. When fuel oil is in short supply and electricity is cut, North Korean hospitals virtually cease to function because so much equipment is dependent on electricity. Ewa Eriksson-Fortier, former Red Cross representative in Pyongyang, said that whereas country wide potable water supply was pretty good in the '80s the system is in bad shape today and requires huge investment to give everybody safe drinking water. A lot of the movement from North to South in the early '50s was not because of ideological reasons, but because of the fear of likely US nuclear bombing. People in Guam annually ask to be decolonized but the UN, under USA pressure, will not process their decolonization claim. 29% of Guam is held by the US military and against the local population's wishes, this is being increased to 40%. The US Camp Humphreys, South of Seoul, has become the largest military camp in the world.

During the forum, negative reports started seeping in from the Summit and it became clear that nothing positive was going to come out of it. Quite the contrary, more of the same, make the sanctions work more efficiently. Aggravate the tension, not lessen it.

A decision was made to shorten the forum by half an hour and everybody to march down to the Convention Centre and protest to departing delegates. This cut down the time for the final session, alternative pathways to peace – not that any of them seemed to have any new, original or even practical ideas from what I could glean. But to be fair they did not have much time to get their messages across.

Out came all the banners and down we marched to the Convention Centre. This time I held the large (7 foot long!) DPRK flag as a banner – coercing a friendly Filipina to hold the other end. The banners were predominately from the Women Cross DMZ brigade. They all lined up for a photo op. We stood behind and held the DPRK flag up as high as we could. Pretty soon, one of the Women Cross DMZ women, Kozue Akibayashi, International President of the Women's League for Freedom and Peace, (WILFP) came and asked me to take the flag away. She said that when this is seen in South Korea it will cause trouble. The same old story. I said "You are wanting to exclude North Korea. North Korea is not the problem. They have to be involved to get a solution" She got angry.

"Did you hear my speech this afternoon?" she said abruptly.

"Yes."

"I said North Korea is not the problem!" sharply.

"By excluding this flag you are excluding North Korea. This is symptomatic of the whole problem. Isolation is not the answer."

"You are jeopardizing everything we are working for," she said coldly.

I know that Kozue and the others are trying to work with South Korean peace NGOs and that some of them could misunderstand the presence of DPRK flag and think that Women Cross DMZ is a North Korean puppet. So, on the one hand I can understand what she is saying, but on the other, exclusion of any hint of DPRK when seeking peace and reunification between the two Koreas strikes a discordant note.

At this point it started raining, so with my cooperative Filipina companion, I selected a spot sheltered from the rain, out of sight of the cameras, but where any delegate could easily see us. Here we stood in comfort, feeling rather smug as we watched the others get drenched in the rain! Several passerby's came and asked questions.

A few men who could have been delegates walked past studiously avoiding looking in our direction. After standing there for 45 minutes and nobody else emerging from the venue, I



folded my flag and walked. My friendly flag holder had a train to catch but accepted the invitation to join me in a quick pizza evening meal in the adjacent food court.



Photo by Ann Wright.

### **Hands Off North Korea - North Korea and the Danger of Nuclear War. 7 p.m.**

This was organised in the magnificent Vancouver public library by the Vancouver-based NGO Mobilisation Against War and Occupation (MAWO). At Christmas time I had emailed the fulltime MAWO chair and organizer, Alison Bodine, and asked if MAWO was planning any activity for January 16<sup>th</sup> and she had replied they would, but at that stage she didn't know what. What she came up with was an evening address by Dr. Michel Chossodovsky, Professor Emeritus University of Ottawa, Founder and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/>

I got there at 5 to 7 and was lucky to get one of the last seats. The room was over-packed with 110 – 120 people of all ages.

Alison welcomed everybody and asked Ann Wright to open the meeting. Ann is a full time international activist extraordinaire. She served 29 years in the US Army/ Army Reserves and 16 years as a US Diplomat. In 2003, as Acting Ambassador in Afghanistan, she wrote to her boss, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and resigned in protest at the US going into the Iraq war. She speaks strongly, to the point and very well. To my surprise she asked me to identify myself and then told the crowd how much I did for North Korea and getting internationals in there, how Women Cross DMZ would never have got to North Korea, met 250 North Korean women, marched with 5,000 North Korean women in Pyongyang and 2,000 in Kaesong and then crossed the DMZ had it not been for me. Everybody clapped.

That was very nice of her. She did not have to do it, but I think she did so because she had witnessed Kozue demanding that I step aside a few hours earlier at the Convention Centre.

Prof. Chossdovsky spoke to this text: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/what-you-need-to-know-about-north-korea-and-the-dangers-of-nuclear-war/5615328>

He started off by saying how good it was to see such a big crowd because the antiwar peace movement in Canada is as good as dead.

There was a lot of good stuff in what he had to say. His formula for peace is *“that the ‘state of war’ between the US and the DPRK (which prevails under the armistice agreement) be in a sense ‘side-tracked’ and annulled by the signing of a comprehensive bilateral North-South peace agreement, coupled with cooperation and interchange..... Moreover, pursuant to bilateral Peace negotiations, the ROK-US OPCON agreement which places ROK forces under US command should be rescinded. All ROK troops would thereafter be brought under national ROK command.”*

There were a lot of questions and discussion. Chossdovsky’s opening statement that the anti-war peace movement is dead stimulated a lot of comment. And this led to agreement that MAWO would try and bring together selected anti war groups and build up a country wide network. For success you have to undermine the lies that the public are being told, commented the good Prof.

There was also a lot of discussion about Foreign Minister Freeland. The consensus was that she is too close to Washington and the banks, that her family history cannot be ignored as an influence in her actions and that she is in fact a Nazi! There were those in the room who felt there should be a campaign to get rid of her, but somebody else somberly pointed out that she would only be replaced by somebody just the same.

The meeting which was meant to finish at 9p.m. ran through to 9.30 and even then I was unable to get away before 10.30 because a lot of people wanted to ask questions and talk to me. The first to approach me was Chossdovsky who told me that his father and the father of Wolfgang Rosenberg had studied together and were great friends. Wolfgang was of course was one of the founders of the NZ DPRK Society. Small world!

## **Conclusion**

The Summit was a parade of lapdogs. It was futile whichever way you look at it. It achieved nothing positive, and its outcome can only prolong tensions and the risk of war.

The stated objective was to find ways to further escalate the pressure, but from what has been publicised, that was not achieved – so even a believer in sanctions could say it was futile too!

So, to the next question - was the civil society protest action futile?

The short term answer is yes. We did not sway the summit.

The long term answer is no.

A constant drip does wear away the stone.



Photo AP

This photo has popped up in a number of newspapers scattered around the world.