



NCC 日本キリスト教協議会

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NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL IN JAPAN

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## National Christian Council in Japan Statement regarding the Centenary of the 2.8 Declaration of (Korean) Independence and March 1st Independence Movement

This year, 2019, marks the centenary of the March 1st Independence Movement, which arose in the Korean peninsula while under colonial rule by the Empire of Japan.

Soon after entering the 20th century, the Empire of Japan annexed the Korean peninsula by force in 1910, because the peninsula was viewed as a political and geographic bridgehead to achieve full-fledged intrusion into the continent. The colonial control measures that were implemented by the office of the Governor-General of Chosen (Korea) were cruel in the extreme, and are viewed historically as military government. On March 1, 1919, thirty-three religious representatives (of which sixteen were Christian) met at Myung Wol Kwan restaurant in Seoul (then called Hanseong), read aloud the Korean Declaration of Independence, then turned themselves in to the police. This Declaration of Independence was read out again at Pagoda Park, before crowds that had gathered in Seoul to observe the state funeral of Gojeong, the last King of the Yi Joseon dynasty. Joyous cries rose from the gathered people, who tossed hats into the air and began marching in all directions, shouting “Long live independence!” After this, the movement spread like wildfire across the country.

For the following reasons, we Christians in Japan view the “February 8th Declaration of Independence,” whose centenary is marked this year, as a matter of war responsibility that still confronts us today with questions, and as an issue of reconciliation and peace.

First, this independence movement, which arose under Japan’s colonial rule over Korea, was characterized as “violence” by the Governor-General of Korea and Japanese media, despite the fact that it was a non-violent activity involving only the shouting of “Long live independence!” The description of this as a “riot” by colonialism-minded authorities and media planted fear, prejudice and hatred in the hearts of Japanese citizens, and led to the increase of discrimination toward Korean people among the Japanese. As a result, a demagogic rumor that “Koreans are rioting”, which was issued from the Funabashi Naval Transmission Station after the Great Kanto Earthquake of September 1923, spread quickly and led to the tragic slaughter of approximately 7,000 Koreans. The fact that Mizuno Rentaro, who was Japan’s Minister of the Interior at the time, had been the Parliamentary Commissioner (head of civilian administration) of the Governor-General of Korea from August 1919, cannot be considered unrelated to the problem of the false rumor issued from the Funabashi Naval Transmission Station. We view the history of the Korean March 1st Independence Movement and the slaughter of Koreans after the Great Kanto Earthquake as closely related, and Japan should be conscious of its historical responsibility for this.

Second, when the Paris Conference was held in February 1919 to settle World War I, the Japanese delegation led by Makino Nobuaki proposed to include a clause to eliminate racial discrimination in the Covenant of the League of Nations, whose establishment was being planned. Although this article was not accepted, the proposal was motivated by Japanese government concerns about the anti-Japanese (immigrant) exclusion movement, which had arisen in the United States. While the Japanese government sought humane treatment for Japanese immigrants who had emigrated to the United States, we can say that it did not apply the same treatment to Korean people, who were suffering under the cruel colonial rule of the Empire of Japan and had been made “imperial subjects.” Rather, it promoted the diametrically opposite path of exploitation and repression. In this we can see the true character of colonial domination under the Empire of Japan. We must also be mindful that Japanese colonial domination functioned as a structure which trapped Japanese citizens in a racist value system.

Third, the “3.1 Declaration of Independence,” which was issued on March 1, 1919, was preceded, on February 8, by the “2.8 Declaration of Independence,” which was daringly proclaimed under the watchful eye of Japanese



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authorities by several hundred Korean students who gathered for a nation-saving rally at a Korean Christian Church in Kanda, Tokyo. Studnets, who avoided arrest at that time, returned to Korea with the Declaration sewn into the lining of his student uniform and informed a minister, who had previously instructed him, about the 2.8 revolt. It is not an overstatement to say that the announcement of the 3.1 Declaration of Independence by 33 religious representatives, and the ensuing 3.1 Long Live Independence Movement, were inspired by the 2.8 Declaration of Independence Announcement Rally. That the Korean students who planned this 2.8 Declaration Rally were Christians, and that they were closely linked by deep trust with supporter Yoshino Sakuzo, who preached *Minponshugi* (politics of the people) within the “Taisho Democracy” movement, is attested to by Yoshino’s diary entries of February 9 and March 19, 1919. Yoshino Sakuzo, who was a conscientious intellectual firmly rooted in Christian faith at a time when freedom of expression was restricted and controlled dramatically under Japan’s national Shinto system, lamented the tone of discourse in Japan against the 3.1 Independence Movement, characterizing it in an essay as a “notable paralysis of the outward (international) conscience of (Japanese) citizens.” We learn deeply from the history of Yoshino Sakuzo and others, who felt limitless sympathy and hope for the 2.8 Declaration of Independence and the 3.1 Independence Movement, and who pointed toward a promising path to resist and overcome the domination and oppressive structure of the Empire of Japan. Within today’s historical circumstances of extreme rightist political current in Japanese politics, we Christians must remember the history of Japan’s association with the 2.8 Declaration of Independence and 3.1 Independence Movement as important lessons, and confront the challenges of today.

This year, in 2019, as events associated with the Emperor’s succession are being planned, such as the *Daijosai* (Great Thanksgiving Festival Shinto ceremony), we are confronted again with questions about the Japanese government’s contravention of the principle of separation of state and religion, which is written in the Constitution of Japan. Furthermore, the Abe government is expected to pursue the revision of Article 9 and other sections of Japan’s peace constitution with increased vigor.

We Christians in Japan will faithfully look to the Gospel for the meaning of the history of the Empire of Japan, from the Meiji Restoration (1868) through Japan’s loss in the 2nd World War, in this East Asia region. We will return once more to our confession of faith in the light of the Japanese Empire’s wars of aggression and colonial domination and, together with Christians of the Korean peninsula who struggle for peaceful reunification of North and South Korea, we will aim toward a peace of true reconciliation and coexistence between North and South Korea and Japan. We will also safeguard the democracy that is based on the Peace Constitution of Japan, resist xenophobic nationalism, and pray for the guidance of the Lord of Peace, as we follow our mission path toward a peace of inclusion.

We focus our thoughts on the passionate call to Christians in Japan by our Lord Jesus Christ, who guides the process of reconciliation and peace toward reunification in the Korean peninsula. Forgiven, made new, and united by the Lord of the cross and resurrection, we hereby commit to the following:

- ◇ Returning to the faith of our confession of sins and responsibilities of war, we will work with the National Council of Churches in Korea for reconciliation and peace between Japan and Korea, remaining mindful of the Japanese Empire’s domination of colonies (Taiwan, Korea) through national Shintoism, the problem of former “comfort women” of the Imperial Army of Japan, and the problem of impressed laborers (Koreans impressed into labor under Japanese rule).
- ◇ Safeguarding the spirit of permanent peace and renunciation of war that is carved into the Preamble and Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan entrusted to us after World War II, and determined to prevent resurrection of an imperial-statist ideology, we will continue the fight to protect the principle of separation of state and religion prescribed in the Constitution of Japan.



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- ◇ We will link arms with the struggle of the people of Okinawa against war and for peace, voice opposition against hate speech and various other forms of racism, and work to realize an inclusive society with foreigners in Japan.
- ◇ Seeking reconciliation and an inclusive peace in North-East Asia, we will follow the path of reconciliation and peace that aims toward peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, we will stand with people who suffer from radiation damage or still take refuge from the after-effects of the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident, and we will carry forward the mission to strive toward establishment of a de-nuclearized, nuclear-weapon-free zone in all of North-East Asia, including Japan.

January 18, 2019

National Christian Council in Japan

Kim Sungjae, General Secretary

Kitamura Keiko, Chair, Committee on Women

Harada Mitsuo, Chair, Committee on Urban-Rural Mission

Hoshide Takuya, Chair, Committee on Yasukuni Shrine Issues

Koizumi Tsugu, Chair, Committee on Buraku Discrimination Issues

Naito Shingo, Chair, Committee on Peace and Nuclear Issues

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