

NARPI Call for Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula

For decades tensions in Northeast Asia surrounding history, territory, militaries, and nuclear weapons have peaked and dipped, due to the work of political actors both inside the region and beyond, who seek only their own nation's gain. The "hot spot" of our region—the Korean Peninsula—is the only region of the world still divided by the otherwise long-gone Cold War Era. However, the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang enabled a new wave of exchange, and we are now observing dramatic potential for change in the relationship between the two Koreas and other stakeholders.

Northeast Asia Regional Peacebuilding Institute (NARPI) will hold its 8th annual Summer Peacebuilding Training in Jeju Island, South Korea, from August 8-21, 2018. NARPI trainings have been held yearly since 2011, in rotating locations around Northeast Asia.

As people who work on peacebuilding in the region, we feel it is hopeful and timely that this year's NARPI training will take place in Korea, on Jeju Island. We hope to contribute to the growth of this new wave of peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula and in the region—a wave that is still quite weak, but that we aim to strengthen through our gathering.

Each year NARPI trainings bring together nearly 70 people—participants, facilitators and volunteers from all over the region (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Mongolia). University students, school teachers, university professors, NGO workers, and other peace-loving people join to form a microcosm of a new regional identity, based on healthy relationships and understanding.

Jae Young Lee, NARPI Executive Director, explains the idea behind this civil society effort for peace, "We believe in the role of politics, but the people—civil society—are the ones who are most affected by politics, and we also have a very important responsibility to bring about change."

At every NARPI training two weeks of courses are offered; three courses run simultaneously in each week of the training. Over the past seven years, NARPI has offered a variety of peacebuilding courses focusing on conflict transformation, peace education, restorative justice, trauma, mediation, and other areas.

A three-day field trip, between the two weeks of course work, provides an opportunity to learn history together first-hand. NARPI field trips focus on the history of pain and conflict in the part of the region where the training is held each year, as well as current peacebuilding efforts. Together we aim to acknowledge the pain and trauma that people have experienced; as often as possible, by listening to the voices of the survivors of war or violence. We've listened to voices of victims for seven years—in Seoul, Inje (near the DMZ), Nanjing, Taipei, Jinshan, Ulaanbaatar, Hiroshima and Okinawa—and the simple message about war is the same: "Never again!"

Friends in Northeast Asia and beyond, we invite you to publicize widely and join the 2018 Summer Peacebuilding Training in Jeju Island, from August 8-21. By supporting NARPI especially this year, we can collectively seize the moment and send a message to the world that people of conscience from several nations have come together in this grassroots effort to identify ways to build peace in Northeast Asia—in the same way a house is built, from the bottom up. For more information, visit narpi.net.

We also ask you to join us in speaking out not only against war but also for peacebuilding, to the political powers that also shape our present and future. We pray and advocate that in the upcoming summits in April (the two Koreas) and May (U.S.-North Korea), leaders will examine best practices in peacebuilding as a new, broader framework for a sustained dialogue that includes voices directly from citizens. We add our voice to the loud call for reconciliation and peace on the Korean Peninsula, and in Northeast Asia.