

# Visiting Gender Equality Support Organization

## Women Making Peace

Ahn Kim Jeong Ae, Representative

### Who We are

Women Making Peace was founded in 1997 and celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017. The purpose of the establishment was to “make peace on the Korean Peninsula with the power of women”. In other words, we thought that if we do not overcome the division, we will not be able to escape the difficulties and the fetters of life faced by Korean women. We believe that the reason why women’s life on the Korean Peninsula is hard is because of male-centered geography due to “militaryism” stemming from the “division” and the “patriarchal system” reinforced by the “separation”. Throughout the Korean War and the history of the separation, there have been a number of female widows, children who lost their parents, and women diaspora scattered from their original places of living. Within the context, Women Making Peace has been established to create a new frame to overcome this problem with the awareness of the negative impacts of the division on women’s life and to build peace on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia with the power of women.

### Responses Activities on Related Issues

#### The Concept of Peace that is Built by Women and the Peace that Women Want

Clearly, peace is a difficult and abstract concept. However, there must be peace at the base of everything. First, I think peace is the condition in which one can protect one’s self-esteem, with economic fundamentals such as food, clothing, and shelter basically provided. Second, it is peace that one is free of any kind or any pretext of violence. Third, peace guarantees individual’s freedom to think, say and act. In short, the peace I think is not situations of conflict, violence and war but where one can live a life that is one wish and can determine, where no one is being compared with others, and free from hierarchical system.

## **The Awareness, Level of Agreement, Appropriateness, and Sentiment Level of Unification among Korean Women Understood by Women Making Peace**

Before discussion about the awareness, level of agreement, appropriateness, and sentiment level of unification among Korean women, I would like to raise questions about the survey methods that had been used for above issues. Once there was a chance to examine the questionnaires that have been conducted so far. Where I felt that the way of asking questions was very dry and used male-centered language. In other words, the survey method had limitations in actually embracing women's voices.

For example, it is true that women in the past had significantly less opportunity to get information about the background or the development of the situation of war than men, and that there were difficulties in clarifying the facts through the testimony of the women survivors who experienced the war at the time. However, yet it cannot be said that the voices of women survivors who have experienced the division and the war are worthless, and it is not justifiable that the accurate information was recognized as insufficient from masculine point of view and has died out. I think it is necessary to survey the level of awareness, understanding and consensus level of women in unification through questions written from the perspective of women. An example of a new survey question might be "have you went through suffering by the separation? Please share your experience related to this".

On the other hand, the perception of unification differs according to the generation. Women from the generations who have experienced the war and division are still surprised by seeing the red color. When it comes to unification, it is often said that "if unification means living in peace, we agree (somewhat lacking in specificity)". On the other hand, the younger generation mainly talks about the expenses of the division and obligatory military service. With a difference in perception among generations about unification, I think the thoughts of women in their 20-30s are important for unification and peace in the future and it is the role of our generation to nurture young women peace activists for this.

## **The Main Gender Issues that Have Recently Been Discussed or Conversd Among Feminists**

In fact, the unification movement is fairly male-centered and hierarchical. For example, recently, there was the "june 15<sup>th</sup> North-South

Overseas Committee Meeting (June 21st~June 23rd)" in Pyongyang centering on the "June 15<sup>th</sup> South Korean Committee". However, during the delegation selection process, there were cases where six representatives were rejected without any explanation from the government, and representatives of women, labor, and national groups were excluded. I think more than 50% of female committee members should have attended this meeting where peace and unification is discussed. Women should be actively involved and able to raise their voices from an important starting point for planning unification and peace.

On the other hand, the recent main gender issues among feminists are the Me Too movement and abolition of anti-abortion law. Recently, an estimated 45,000 young women gathered at Hyehwa station to voluntarily demonstrated the Me Too movement. Watching the rally, I thought that the candlelight protest was leading to the Me Too movement. At first sight, peaceful ways may seem helpless, but in the end, non-violent peace demonstrations are right.

I think the level of sentiment of peace felt by Korean women is very low and the reason why Korean women are not peaceful is because of the multi-layered issues of division of society and patriarchal and Confucian ideology due to division and the war are intertwined. Older generations have not made the right path for the younger generation, nor have they shown the right way. They also failed in offering any value other than money. I believe the peace is where young women can freely do whatever they want to do. Older generation women should strive to protect young women's livelihood, culture, and self-esteem, for them "to do whatever they want, what they are good at, and yet not starving". On the other hand, from a community point of view, there is still a more male-centered culture in the suburban areas, and I think it needs to be opened through more democratic changes. It is also important for the government to create and revise laws with a feminist perspective.

## Future Plans

Currently, we are planning a direct exchange model, "Eco Femi Farm (Women's ecological farm)" which utilize DMZ area and saves nature in it. As for the early initiatives, there is the Kimchi Festival, which was proposed by the North Korean Women's delegation at the Bali Peace Summit in February 2016. It is a win-win model for women in North and South Korea to secure economic independence and identity, where for 6 months, North and South Korean women plant and harvest Chinese cabbages in the DMZ area where cultivation is possible and do gimjang

together. If we build trust between the two Koreas through this way, in the future, we will be able to contribute to developing community together. Meanwhile, on December 23, 2015, with the approval of the government, a cultural exchange event for South and North Korea, which had been cut off for a long time was able to be held for a day. In the future, however, the relations between South and North Korean women should not be one-time events, but should be promoted as the relationship of sustainable peace and mutual prosperity. Peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula is possible when it is the peninsula of life, peace, and coexistence. In the future, the government will have to fully support the multifaceted cooperation and exchange of all levels and the sustainable development of women on the Korean peninsula, and strive to create a peace community on the peninsula by making related policies, as agreed at the Panmunjom Declaration by the both sides. Also, women should build concrete plans and strengthen their willingness to practice.