

PROK E-NEWS

Special Edition July 4, 2008

PROK holds emergency prayer meeting

Following last week's ministerial notice of the government's decision to resume US beef imports (PROK E-News June 2008), the administration, taking what many perceived as an attitude of heightened arrogance, declared the candlelight street protests illegal, and the use of violence by the police in suppressing the protests dramatically increased. Deeply concerned by both the attitude of the administration and the degree of violence, leaders of the religious sector stepped forward in an effort to end the violence. The Catholic Priests' Association for Justice and Peace led a public outdoor mass in front of Seoul City Hall on the evening of June 30, decrying the government and law enforcement authorities' "new hard-line approach" and admonishing the current administration for "its lack of humility". On the evening of July 3rd the Protestants led a public prayer meeting at City Hall, and tonight, July 4th, the leadership will be Buddhist.

In the late afternoon of yesterday, July 3, the PROK held an emergency prayer meeting at Hyangnin Church in downtown Seoul calling for "restoration of the people's sovereignty and guarantee of peaceful public gatherings". In spite of the suddenness of the call to prayer, some 400 worshippers filled the church to overflowing, ministers and other PROK members coming from as far away as Haenam and Pusan at the southern end of the peninsula. After the service all participants, led by the Moderator and General Secretary and other executive officers of the church, processed through the streets to the plaza in front of City Hall to join the worship service and candlelight protest led that evening by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK).

In the specially-prepared statement read during the emergency prayer meeting, the PROK reproved the present administration for ignoring the people's insistence on food safety and sovereignty of food inspection; for violently suppressing the candlelight protests; and for raiding the Seoul offices of the two civic groups who were the main organizers of the protests and arresting several staff, declaring all these actions as a violation of human rights and a threat to the national identity of the Korean people who are guaranteed freedom of public assembly under the constitution. "Where is the president who swore to serve the people? Where is the government that decided to delay implementation of the beef-import agreement until the people feel assured of the safety of their health?... The president and the government must show the people a posture of deep self-reflection and repentance." Further urging the administration to open up full communication between government and people, the PROK ended the statement with four specific demands: 1) Declare re-negotiation of the beef-import agreement, and safeguard inspection sovereignty. 2) Apologize for the search-raid of the Seoul offices of the two civic groups and for the confiscation of their computers and other related materials, and release those who have been detained. 3) Discipline those

responsible for the violent suppression of the street protests, and guarantee the right of peaceful public assembly. 4) Respect the sovereignty of the people and heed the will of the people expressed through their candlelight protests.

In his sermon during the NCKK-led worship on the same evening in front of City Hall, Rev. Im Myoung-Kyu, who also preached at the PROK emergency prayer meeting and who is not only moderator of the PROK but current president of the NCKK, declared that in the face of police violence which is reminiscent of earlier dictatorship governments “we cannot remain silent”, quoting Jesus who responded to those who would silence the crowd as Jesus approached Jerusalem, “I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out.” While referring to police violence, both Rev. Im Myoung-Kyu and the statement read during the NCKK worship called also for peace on the part of protesters as well. The NCKK statement, whose points were generally the same as those of the PROK statement, ended with the call to move from an era of economic success to an era of true happiness, or fullness of life, for all. During the NCKK-led service an offering was taken up to help pay the hospital costs of all those injured during the protests, including the police.

Please see photographs on the next two pages. We apologize that the photos, produced for the PROK website (Korean) include Korean captions on the photos themselves.



The PROK General Secretary (2nd from right holding banner) and Moderator (centre, with red vestment) and other leaders heading the PROK procession to City Hall



PROK ministers and members process to City Hall



PROK ministers and members participate in NCKK-led service at City Hall

PROK E-News is a publication of The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).

Editor: Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, General Secretary