TWA to attend Asia Democracy Network Founding Assembly

October 21 to 25, 2013

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On behalf of Tibetan Women’s Association, I would like to thank Tenzin Palkyi la (National Endowment for Democracy) for putting all efforts to make it possible for TWA to attend Asia Democracy Network conference in South Korea.

Introduction

The founding assembly of Asia Democracy Network (ADN) conference was held in conjunction with the 3rd Seoul Democracy Forum (SDF-III) hosted and organized by the Korean Democracy Foundation (KDF) in Seoul, South Korea from 21 to 24 October, 2013.
The proposed Founding Assembly of the ADN is a joint initiative of Korean Democracy Network (KDN) which is composed of four democracy-related organizations, namely Korea Democracy Foundation (KDF), Korea Human Rights Foundation (KHRF), Center for Korean Women and Politics (CKWP) and East Asia Institute (EAI) in partnership with like-minded civil society organizations and institutions engaged in democracy promotion in Asia, including 15 Organizing Committee members for the ADN’s founding assembly.

This founding assembly of Asia Democracy Network focused on challenges of Democratization to Civil Society in Asia and linked relativity of Democracy to Peace and Development.

The Joint theme of the conference was “Challenges of Inclusive Democratization to Civil Society in Asia; Linking Democracy to Peace and Development” and following are the topics that the conference focused under the theme:

* Peace Building, Development and Democracy in Asia
* Defending and Empowering Civil Society in Asia
Strengthening Democratic Governance in Asia
Civic and Democracy Education in Asia
Poverty, Inequality and Democracy in Asia

The primary goal of ADN is to promote and consolidate democracy and democratic governance making use of international cooperation and solidarity in the fields of information-sharing, capacity-building, research and advocacy, in particular through international engagement in intern-governmental processes and through action-oriented research on democracy. ADN aims to be a watchdog for a mature democracy in Asia.

This conference was joined by the over 80 civic leaders and democracy activists from all corners of Asia.

Day one (21st October, 2013):

As I got visa late, I was unable to attend the welcome session held on 20th October. However, I reached South Korea on 21st October and able to attend the actual session on time. The launching of the Asia Democracy Network was welcomed by Dr. Bong-scuk Sohn, the president of
Center for Korean Women and Politics on behalf of the Korean Democracy Network. Dr. Sohn talked briefly on Korean democratization, diversity of Asia and importance of international network of civil society organizations and networks as well as democracy advocates who are dedicated to the strengthening of democracy and human rights in Asia. Dr Sohn also focused on significance of ADN: ADN’s goal is to promote and consolidate democracy and democratic governance, and to advance human rights through international cooperation and solidarity among democracy advocates and human rights defenders in Asia.

The conference was divided into three sessions: Thematic Session in the morning, Country session on Civil Society Space in the afternoon and Networking Session in the evening.

The Thematic Session in the morning was focused on emerging challenges to participatory democracy in Asia-Civil society response and strategies.
The panelists covered following topics:

* Human rights defenders by Mr. John from FORUM-ASIA
* Freedom of express and independence of media by Ms Melinda from SEAPA
* Free and fair election by Mr Ichal from ANFREL
* Anti-corruption and transparency by Mr. Ran from TI-Asia
* Rule of Law by Mr Arlegue from CALD
* Gender and democracy by Ms Kumudini from DAWN
* Poverty, development and democracy by Mr Netra Prasad from SAAPE
* ODA and democracy by Mr. Massaki Ohasi from JANIC/ADA

Panelists were given very short time to speak on the topic and all of them connect their topic with the real situation in their own countries. I came to know more detail on
how civilians in all these Asian nations are deprived from enjoying the real democracy and how the activists and NGO play crucial roles in defending the fundamental rights of citizens. Even all these Asian nations are independent; they are facing such a difficult situation under their own government. The political situation in countries like Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal and Cambodia are frightening.

During the tea break I got chance to speak with participants from Philippines and Nepal. With the Philippine lady, I talked about Tibetan Women’s Organization and its important role in empowering Tibetan women and in strengthening the Tibetan communities. She knew about Dalai Lama and Tibet is under Chinese occupation, but asked me to tell her more detail on the current status of Tibetans inside Tibet. I enjoyed talking with her because her questions and curiosities were to know about the real situation of Tibetan people inside Tibet, not about the scenic landscape of Tibetan plateau and Dharamsala.

With a participant from Nepal, I talked about the situation in Nepal. He said that even though he is a full time activist to advocate democracy and human rights,
he doesn’t know much about Tibetan issue. The present Nepal administration is not only damaging the freedom of Tibetans in Nepal, but all citizens are unhappy. I told him about deteriorating situation of Tibetans in Nepal: the way in which Nepal polices treated Tibetans badly during the uprising in 2008 and also about the secret cremation of two monks who self-immolated in Nepal. The core purpose of interacting with participants from Nepal is to strengthen the relationship between the Nepali and Tibetan community in Nepal.

The Country Session on Civil Society Space in the afternoon covered on “Defending Civil Society Space” and “Promoting Safe and Enabling Environment in Asia.” The session was held in various rooms and each session had three to four panelists from different countries in Asia. I joined in the session with panelists from China, Mongolia and Vietnam. Han Dongfan, a Han Chinese and the director of China Labour Bulletin from Hong Kong spoke on Labour’s movement in China. He said that rise of Labour’s movement is one of the major push of civil society for democratization of China. It is clear that in China, there isn’t space provided by the government for
labourers to raise their issues but the emerging power of labour in China is the result of labourers’ push. He also mentioned role of social media like ‘Weibo’ to strengthen the network between lawyers, workers, activists and writers. After the session, Q&A opportunity was given to participants and I raised a question to Mr. Han Dongfan about his bulletin’s activeness and focus on minorities’ labour rights in China. He answered that so far he didn’t highlight the minorities’s labour rights due to its political sensitiveness, but he has done extensive researches and planning to extend his bulletin to cover more issues in future.

The evening session discussed on selection of steering committee for the founding assembly of Asia Democracy Network and all the regional and international networks and organization raise their candidates.

Day Two and Three (22nd and 23rd October, 2013):

The day two and three were divided with plenary session and other five sessions:
Plenary session covered on Peace, Development and Democracy in Asia.

Asian Nations, each forming a modern state from the ruins of World War II after enduring the colonial rule of Western powers, share the experience of putting off or delaying the establishment of democratic values and system based on the argument of “development first, democracy later.”

Asian Nations also suffered a double ordeal from the “security first, democracy later” thinking that emerged from experiencing the Korean and Vietnam Wars following World War II. Given this background, through this forum they shared experiences in democratic governance and strengthening of civil society capability at both regional and global levels.

Democracy and civil society in Asia today face a two-sided situation where economic crisis is threatening the lowest level of procedural democracy and there is at the same time advancement toward an era of development cooperation that seeks “sustainable development” based on a concept
of development assistance that emphasizes reciprocity rather than donation. Democratic values grounded in civil society, on overcoming the limitations of representative democracy through raising civic consciousness and on the philosophy and importance of democratic citizenship education as prerequisite and precondition for the realization of participatory democracy.

**Day Four (24th October):**

Field trip to Demilitarized Zone was very educational and a historic place to visit.

It has been 55 years since two people and the land of Korea was torn apart by the Korean War. This Demilitarized Zone splits the peninsula into two and even now Korea considers it as a reminder of their nation’s pain and frustration, and also an endangering factor to world peace and a shame to civilization. Nevertheless, the whole area of DMZ is also the historical stage for an incredible ecological revival, bustling with nature and life, which no manpower can substitute. The isolation from wars, conflicts and killings has transformed the territory into a peaceful habitat for wildlife.
The Korean War not only caused tremendous suffering and terrible damage to the Korean race but also brought about international effects intensifying the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Korean War also inflicted severe losses in a socioeconomic respect. In spite of differences of the losses depending on the data, it was miserable warfare that caused more than 4.8 million causalities on both sides.

The establishment of DMZ is based upon the “Armitice Agreement” signed on July 27th, 1953. The article states that the military demarcation line shall be fixed and both sides shall withdraw two kilometers form this line so as to establish a demilitarized zone between the opposing forces. A demilitarized zone shall be established as a buffer zone to prevent the occurrence of incidents which might lead to a resumption of hostilities.

We spent a night at The Korea DMZ Peace-Life Valley; this valley holds the values and aspiration to create a ‘desirable development model’ that conserves the ecology, history and culture of the DMZ region while improving the quality of life of its inhabitants.
Voice-TWA’s Newsletter

Day Five (25th October, 2013):

On 25th October, we came back to Seoul from DMZ and we were received at KDF office for refreshment and tour in the archive of KDF office. The archive is maintained at international level, all the data, letters, pictures, cassettes, tapes, videos, dresses, equipment, etc are maintained amazingly well! The archive is enriched by all these historic proofs of the history of the democratization movement in Korea. This tour was educational and eye opening.

After this, we were invited to have final farewell lunch and all the participants in this DMZ tour said goodbye to each other.

Conclusion

Journey to attend this ADN conference was very educational; I got opportunity to see how human rights activists from different parts of Asia work hard to enhance democracy and human rights in their own countries. There are many things that we should learn from the other Asian nations who suffered under colonization and then to built a democratic nation.
This journey to South Korea is my first exposure to see the lands beyond my exile home. After meeting people from different parts of the world and seeing the culture, lifestyle, food, and landscape of South Korea I realized the truth of this famous line “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page” said by St. Augustine. I thank each and every individual who make this journey memorable and important to advocate the status of Tibetans inside Tibet.