

Why Dr. Kang Won Yong Was Selected for the Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation (Nichiko Niwano, president, and Motoyuki Naganuma, chairman) has decided to award the 17th Niwano Peace Prize to the South Korean Christian leader Dr. Kang Won Yong, 82. This decision was reached after careful deliberation by a screening committee of seven members representing the Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic faiths who chose from nominations offered by 1,000 recognized authorities in 125 different countries.

Dr. Kang, a Presbyterian, is not only one of South Korea's most distinguished religious leaders, he has also been at the forefront of activities to promote international interfaith dialogue. In addition to his religious activities, Dr. Kang has long fought for social justice in his country and has promoted cultural and artistic undertakings. In 1998, he was selected as one of 24 people who helped shape Korean history in a public poll conducted by MANIF (Manifestation d'Art Nouveau International et Forum).

Dr. Kang was chairman of the Korea Christian Students Movement Committee and the Korean National Council of Churches. In 1962, he established the Korea Christian Academy and became its director. Through the Academy's interfaith dialogue committee he has sponsored more than 100 meetings for dialogue among South Korea's six leading religions. In 1986, Dr. Kang established the Korean Conference on Religion and Peace (KCRP). That year the KCRP played the central role in ensuring the success of the Third Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP (企)), of which Dr. Kang was elected president.

High expectations for Dr. Kang's ability to promote dialogue among the world's different religions led to his being chosen for the post of ACRP moderator and as a president of the International Committee of the WCRP, among numerous other positions. Last year, he served as chairman of the preparatory committee for the 7th World Assembly of the WCRP, held in Amman, Jordan. In addition, he has held positions of responsibility in the Christian Conference of Asia(CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Equally important to Dr. Kang has been his deep concern for social justice in South Korea. In the 1970s when the country was ruled by a military regime, Dr. Kang led movements for human rights and democracy and was a representative member of the National Conference for the Recovery of Democracy. He promoted several hundred dialogues with the military leaders for a return to democratic processes and rallied support throughout South Korea for social justice, human rights, and environmental protection within a framework of democratic government and continuing industrialization. Dr. Kang's activities extended even further, to encompass efforts for the unification of North and South Korea, reconciliation in labor disputes, freedom of speech, and educational programs for women and laborers. His arrest in 1979 by the KCIA for allegedly subversive activities only served to highlight his considerable influence on his fellow South Korean citizens.

Dr. Kang has long had a keen interest in culture and the arts and has played an active role in promoting artistic endeavors in broadcasting, drama, film, and traditional Korean culture. He served as chairman of the Screening Committee for the Asian Movie Festival held in Seoul in 1965, directed both the Conference of the Public Helping the Disabled in Korea and the World Festival of the International Theatre Institute held in Seoul, chaired the Culture and Arts Promotion Committee for the Seoul Olympics, and also chaired the organizing committee for World Academic Conference of Seoul Olympics.

In his book in Korean, whose title in English would be *From the Wilderness*, Dr. Kang describes himself as not a politician, social activist, or religionist, but as a "voice in the wilderness." The wilderness he refers to is a world of evil spirits, a place where the economy comes first, where

power means everything, and where fanatical religions reign supreme. As a "voice in the wilderness" Dr. Kang says: "We must subdue the evil spirits of the wilderness and create a world where the highest value is placed on humanity and life. To ensure that these ultimate goals are not utilized for materialistic interests or power plays, we must deliver our utmost efforts to make love, justice, and peace realities in this world."

Dr. Kang has devoted all of his 82 years to love, justice, and peace. In bestowing the 17th Niwano Peace Prize upon him, the Niwano Peace Foundation wishes to express its high esteem for his contributions to peace and religious cooperation, to commend his numerous achievements to date, and to encourage others to follow in his footsteps.