

"From Ireland to Liberia, women have achieved a peaceful resolution when armies could not. We of Women Cross DMZ want to explore the possibilities of talking instead of silence, removing landmines instead of creating more, and uniting families divided by the DMZ before it's too late."

- Gloria Steinem



Images clockwise from top: Christine Ahn, Medea Benjamin, Hyun-Kyung Chung, Gloria Steinem, Mairead Maguire and Janis Alton in Pyongyang, DPRK; Women's Peace Symposium in Pyongyang, DPRK (credit David Gutfelder); Janis Alton, Ewa Eriksson Fortier, North Korean woman, and Meri Joyce in women's peace walk in Kaesong, DPRK.

Why Women Must Be Part of the Solution to End the Korean Conflict

Canada's Role in Making Peace

Canada in the Korean War

Canada was among 17 countries that fought in the 1950-53 Korean War under the UN Command, an alliance of national armies led by the United States against North Korea and China. The Canadian Forces sent 26,000 soldiers and 8 destroyers to the Korean Peninsula and in three years 516 Canadians died (312 in combat).

On July 27, 1953 military commanders from the United States on behalf of the UN Command, North Korea, and China signed the Armistice Agreement which temporarily halted fighting and promised to resolve the war with a peace agreement.

Article 4, Paragraph 60 of the Armistice Agreement called for replacing the ceasefire with a peace treaty within 90 days. Sixty-five years later, no peace agreement has been signed and, as a result, war has defined relations between Washington and Pyongyang arresting progress towards peace, reconciliation, and eventual reunification of the two Koreas.

Canada's Intermediary Peacemaking Role

Canada has played a critical role in fostering diplomatic solutions to longstanding conflicts. In 2014 Canada quietly hosted seven meetings between the Obama and Castro administrations in Ottawa and Toronto which ultimately led to normalized relations between Washington and Havana, ending six decades of enmity. Stephen Harper, Canada's Prime Minister at that time, explained Canada's role in brokering this relationship, "We facilitated places where the two countries could have a dialogue and explore ways of normalizing the relationship."¹

In light of Canada's strong relations with Cuba, which has longstanding diplomatic relations with North Korea, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau explained that Canada has had conversations with Havana about a constructive role it could play. In his conversation with President Raul Castro last year, Trudeau explained at an event in Charlottetown, P.E.I. that "Canada can... play a role that the United States has chosen not to play this past year."²

History of Canada's Governmental & Civil Society Relations with North Korea

Canadian civil society, especially Canadian churches, has played a leadership role in providing urgent humanitarian aid and assistance, and facilitating diplomatic channels between the North Korean and Canadian governments. Here is a brief timeline of such exchanges:

1980s

Throughout the 1980s Canadian churches were involved in the World Council of Churches (WCC) campaign to encourage unification.

In 1989 the Korea Christian Federation (KCF), the official Protestant body in North Korea, visited the U.S. Council of Churches. It was the first time since the Korean War that North Koreans were granted visas to the United States.

1991

In May, a 15-member delegation of Canadian Parliamentarians, Senators, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs members attended the 85th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Pyongyang.

In October a KCF delegation visited Canadian churches and met with Canada's Ministry of External Affairs.

1995

In response to North Korea's 1995 floods, Canada began humanitarian assistance.

A three-member Canadian academic delegation traveled to North Korea for Track II dialogues.

1996

Vice President and Professor from the University of British Columbia traveled to North Korea. North Koreans reciprocated with a visit to the University of British Columbia (UBC).

The same year, a Canada Food Grains Bank fact-finding delegation went to North Korea. Canadian churches lobbied the Foreign Minister and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to match grants for North Korea, which were approved in April 1997.

1998

In May, a Roundtable on North Korea was held in Winnipeg, led by the Dept. of Foreign Affairs to brief Foreign Minister Axworthy on the situation in North Korea.

1999

A six-member Canadian delegation of academics and foreign ministry visited North Korea.

2000

In July, Canada formally recognized North Korea as a member of the international community. And in late September a 6-person high-level Canadian delegation went to North Korea at the request of Foreign Minister Axworthy to explore potential areas for bilateral cooperation in anticipation of establishing diplomatic relations.

2001

In February, Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley announced formal diplomatic relations with North Korea.

Senator Lois Wilson received a letter from North Korea requesting the establishment of a Korea-Canada Friendship group to enable cultural exchanges between the two countries. For several years, the Canada-DPRKorea Association held exchanges and supported North Korean students studying English in Canada.

2002

In January, a Parliamentary visit to North Korea was canceled, perhaps due to U.S. pressure (President Bush's 'Axis of Evil' statement).

North Korea had planned to build an embassy in Ottawa but it was discouraged, as the relationship had cooled.

2007

A joint U.S. and Canadian academic delegation traveled to North Korea.

2010

On May 25 full diplomatic relations were suspended by Canada and replaced with a Controlled Engagement Policy limiting official bilateral contact to specific topics. Under this policy, official bilateral contact with the North Korean government was limited to subjects concerning: (1) regional security concerns; (2) the human rights and humanitarian situation in North Korea; (3) inter-Korean relations; and (4) consular issues. All government-to-government cooperation and communication on topics not covered under the Controlled Engagement Policy was suspended. This was in response to North Korea's alleged role in the sinking of the ROK's Cheonan.

North Korea agreed to send six professors to study for six months at UBC's Knowledge Partnership Program (KPP).

2011

The first six North Korean professors began studies at the KPP program at UBC. (As of today a total of 40 North Korean academics have participated.)

2015

In May, Janis Alton of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace was among the 30-women peace delegation led by Women Cross DMZ to participate in women's peace symposia in Pyongyang and Seoul and to walk with 10,000 Korean women as they crossed the De-Militarized Zone from North Korea to South Korea.

2016-17

Members of the Canadian Foreign Ministry visited Pastor Lim Hyeon Soo who was detained in North Korea, and secured his release.

Why Women...

On November 1, Canada announced a \$17.1 million commitment over five years towards women's empowerment and to ensure that women are central to peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts. Signed by five Ministers, Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security outlines Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy. Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland stated:

"The path to peace needs empowered women. Where women are included in peace processes, peace is more enduring; where women are included in the economy, economic growth is consistently higher; and where women are included in governance, states are more inclusive and more stable. We hope Canada's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security inspires our international partners to collaborate with us on this important issue and support women in creating an inclusive, gender-equal and stable world."

In the absence of any formal dialogue, we believe it is urgent that women peacemakers convene to discuss avenues for building peace and security in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. According to a study covering three decades of 40 peace processes in 35 countries, an agreement was reached in all but one case when women's groups influenced the peace process.

Their participation also led to higher rates of implementation and durability of agreements. From 1989-2011, of 182 signed peace accords, an agreement was 35 percent more likely to last 15 years or more if women participated in its creation.³

Given Canada's historic role as a participant in the Korean War under the UN Command, its diplomatic relations with North Korea, its backchannel diplomatic role in normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba, and its feminist foreign policy, we view Canada playing a leadership role in pursuing a diplomatic solution to the longstanding Korean conflict.

Canadian Voice of Women for Peace

Established in 1960, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) is a non-partisan Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) comprised of a network of diverse women with consultative status at the United Nations ECOSOC. For 55 years, VOW has tirelessly advocated for a world without war.

<http://vowpeace.org>

Women Cross DMZ

Women Cross DMZ is an organization led by women working globally for peace in Korea. In May 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the division of Korea, Women Cross DMZ led a historic women's peace walk and crossing of the De-Militarized Zone from North to South Korea to draw global attention to the urgent need to end the Korean War with a peace treaty, reunite divided families, and ensure women's leadership in peacebuilding.

www.womencrossdmz.org

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1. Global News, The Associated Press and The Canadian Press: "Canada hosted secret meetings between Cuba and U.S. in Ottawa and Toronto." <https://globalnews.ca/news/1731666/u-s-cuba-seek-to-normalize-relations-after-american-released-from-prison>. December 17, 2014.

2. Global News, The Associated Press and The Canadian Press: "North Korea relations could be cooled using Cuba," Trudeau says. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3877877/north-korean-cuba-trudeau/>. November 23, 2017.

3. Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabhá and Thania Paffenholz. "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes," New York: International Peace Institute, June 2015.