



Taiwan Ecumenical Forum

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan is a member of the WCC, WCRC, CCA, CWM, WSCF, World Day of Prayer, ACT Alliance, and Mission 21.

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Background

In the second half of the 20th century, it was widely perceived by the people of Taiwan that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) played a crucial role in the democratization struggle by serving as a prophetic voice in the society. Since the lifting of the martial law in 1987, the social, political, and ecclesial landscape has been evolving. It changed dramatically after the 2016 elections when Taiwan elected a first female President, Tsai Ing-wen with an overwhelming parliamentary majority for her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). For the first time in Taiwan's history, the Chinese Nationalist's Party (KMT) that ruled Taiwan with an iron fist for seventy years from 1949 is in a minority with only 33% of National Assembly seats.

Taiwan's International Context of Two Empires

Taiwan is set between two Empires: China and the West. Compounding its identity issue, there are two Chinas demanding its allegiance: the Republic of China (ROC) established by the Nationalist regime (KMT) in 1911 and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Ten years after its foundation, the KMT and the Chinese communist party entered a protracted civil war vying for the control of China. Mao Tze Tung's party won and founded the PRC in 1949. The KMT fled to Taiwan with the support of the USA. Taiwan was forced to serve as the refuge of the ROC which turned Taiwan into a military fortress for the illusory dream of the "recovery of China." Following the cruel February 28 Massacre in 1947, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek's ROC imposed "White Terror" rule until 1987.

Simultaneously, Taiwan began to face the external threat and hegemonic pressure of the PRC as a "rising great power." Until today, the PRC employs political, military, economic, cultural and religious means to stifle Taiwan's place internationally and intimidate the Taiwanese people.

The other Empire for Taiwan is the West, eminently represented by the USA, which incorporated Taiwan into the Cold War structure as part of the post-World War II communism "containment policy." Since then, Taiwan, like its neighbors, Japan and Korea, developed into an important economic machine, and integrated into the Empire of the West with much international acclaim. The globalization of the market, ever omnipotent and omnipresent, has brought about the demolition of life, distortion of social values, the commodification of human beings as evidenced in human trafficking and other modern forms of slavery. Phenomena such as child prostitution, day laborers and migrant workers, all suffer the transnational corporation's chase of profit that rapes the dignity and the sacred value of the lives of the poor and other marginalized peoples, inflicts irreparable degradation of the ecosystem and ignores the wellbeing of succeeding generations

International Forum

In February 2017, the PCT invited its partner churches and ecumenical organizations to discern together the signs of the time and to sharpen its missional focus. Forty-five partner churches and ecumenical organizations sent representatives including Asia Church Women's

Conference (ACWC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Council for World Mission (CWM), World Council of Churches (WCC), World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). They engaged in Bible study with one hundred and twenty-five Taiwanese participants many of whom were women and youth. These sessions of exploring the scripture together were immensely beneficial for spiritual support of the Taiwanese who have long felt the isolation from the ecumenical family. Many international partners, for the first time, heard the pain and the cry of the Taiwanese, and the reality of today's Taiwan. This experience led the February 2017 International Ecumenical Forum to propose the establishment of a Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF) to meet an urgent need for information sharing about Taiwan and for mutual support.



The PCT Today

The Heritage

The PCT celebrated its 150 anniversary in 2015. Since its establishment by Scottish and Canadian missionaries, the PCT has inherited their inspiring commitment to the spiritual and physical health of the Taiwanese including their education and the sustainability of the church.

The PCT also became a forward-looking ecumenical church. It is an active member in world ecumenical organizations in which it has served and continues to provide leadership roles. It also enjoys a mutually enriching relationship with forty-two partner churches.

Globally, it is recognized as a missional church that has distinguished itself in prophetic witness, especially during the "White Terror" period from 1947 to 1987. In face of the two Empires of China -- the ROC and the PRC -- PCT courageously spoke out in the form of three public statements in the 1970s calling for urgent reform and appealing for international support for the people's right to self-determination. Despite the subsequent severe repression by the KMT, during which the use of Taiwanese Bibles, Hymnals and newspapers and pamphlets were banned, the PCT concern for the future of Taiwan remains deeply rooted in its self-understanding of the salvific mission of God in Taiwan: the renewal of the corporate body of Christ, the restoration and reaffirmation of the Taiwanese people's identity and dignity.

The martial law era claimed over 20,000 victims who were the elites in the country. PCT pastors and members including one General Secretary, Rev. C. M. Kao, have been jailed for the peaceful expression of their aspirations and beliefs.



The Challenges:

Prophetic Church Caught between Empires

Playing the prophetic role has been costly. The membership has been debating the PCT's appropriate role in the society and the political arena. How should it be the conscience of the country? How should it "walk the talk"?

Underlying this ongoing national conversation is mission and evangelism in the new political context. The PCT is a precious window to the world given that the government of Taiwan is denied international access to many international political, professional, academic organizations. How should the PCT be proactive in working with the government and the civil society in Taiwan to exercise their soft power? For example, can the PCT encourage exchanges with international civil society and international NGOs in the health and the humanitarian sectors?

While the PCT must hold the government accountable in the current national implementation on transitional justice, to what extent should it be engaged in the national debate on the same-sex marriage legislation?

A major issue facing the PCT is the issue related to the Austronesians. The ecumenical movement has not been well-informed about the multicultural makeup of Taiwan whose original inhabitants are Austronesians. There are 18 tribes of varying numbers who are trying very hard to preserve their own heritage, culture and language. Yet, their history is filled with tragedy that still requires accounting. President Tsai has announced the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission to address this tragic history.

PCT has been criticized for its political activism and has for long been alienated from other Taiwan's denominations due to ideological differences. With so many historical and political traumas not yet dealt with and with historical judgment and justice not yet fully accounted for, the PCT continues to experience and witness a weakness in corporate spirituality and distorted cultural values among the Taiwanese people. These issues are particularly evident among the indigenous peoples whose land had been robbed and whose culture and dignity have been shattered.

Set in the context of the life-threatening crises wrought by the two Empires impacts Taiwan core development in all sectors: economic, environmental, political or theological. For example, whereas economic "development" in North East Asia has

created a more prosperous life, their societies face a complex web of enormous challenges: waning and breakdown of families and communities, emergence of a selfishly individualistic mindset of the bourgeois class, consumerist lifestyle with a ferocious pursuit of material commodities and personal success, all leading to a confusion in cultural and national identity.

The February 2017 PCT International Ecumenical Forum final document pointed out:

- * the process of a transitional justice required socialization in the Taiwanese society. The PCT must ensure that the Truth and Reconciliation process for the martial law era and the Indigenous Peoples are implemented with integrity and expeditiously, but always with an unremitting regard for the justice of the victims;
- * the church is itself in need of reform so that the voices of those on the margins of the church, especially women and youth, are truly heard and appreciated.
- * the Indigenous Peoples’ active participation in the church demonstrates their spirit of forgiveness and love and have taught the PCT to be a church with an inclusive heart. The PCT can testify to how it has been empowered and transformed by its willing engagement with those whom others have rejected. But, courage and determination are essential to realise the full breadth of possibility offered by becoming a church open to all
- * economic justice must focus on youth poverty while casting the framework for engagement in the broader and deeper understanding of the impact of the Empire as propounded in the 2004 WCRC ACCRA Confession and the 2010 CWM Empire as Context for Mission;
- * climate environmental justice focused on a case study of a Taiwanese indigenous tribe and was enriched by a fundamental theological reflection and an alternative paradigm of community;
- * a re-reading of Genesis 1:26, to overcome the theology of dominion to be accompanied with Revelation’s promise of “a new heaven and a new earth.” This re-reading is to be done from the Indigenous Peoples perspective of the sacred link between the human and the habitat, and the ecumenical affirmation of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of the Creation (JPIC); and
- * a rethinking of the image of Christ and challenge traditional concepts of ecclesiology, and a commitment to gender justice.

The PCT is called to find fresh means of engagement and dialogue across a diversity of ecclesial traditions: ecumenical, charismatic and Confessional. The current social and political challenges posed by the context of Taiwan call for a unity of purpose and spirit in the church. The PCT must remain a church that welcomes all despite differences in political affiliation and social values. The ecumenical adage of unity in diversity has to be pursued because Jesus Christ called his followers to be one just as he and God are one. These can be honored as gifts and harnessed for the common mission of the church.

Seeking Partnership that Matters Through the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum

The ecumenical movement, the PCT partner churches and the PCT are called to affirm that partnership with the PCT is a shared mission imperative rooted in the Missio Dei and follows Jesus call to a life abundant for all God’s people including the people of Taiwan.

Meaningful partnership in the pilgrimage for justice and peace must indeed involve resource sharing and mutual solidarity. This modality is key in the global struggle for justice in the context of empires. The PCT has an important place and a leadership role in the global ecumenical struggles for self-determination of peoples and indigenous rights. The humiliation of Taiwan in the international community, the current political and ecclesiastical situation, the depth of the suffering and oppression of a people denied independence and self-determination provide the focus and locus for ecumenical partnership and missional engagement.

The PCT often felt neglected, left on their own in a global and ecumenical context where the voice and support for PCT and the Taiwanese cause were often invisible and absent from the mainstream ecumenical action for justice and peace. Ecumenical partnership and solidarity must affirm and embrace the specific historic prophetic role of the PCT in securing the freedom, dignity and identity of Taiwan as a full and independent member of the community of nations.

The ongoing life and witness of several ecumenical communities in the global south has given a new appreciation of perspectives and a mutual awareness of the chasm that separated them. In face of the life-threatening crises of the Empires spearheaded by the economic globalization, ecumenical commitment to life-affirming inclusive communities will bring about hope and transformation of lives. This significant learning was highlighted at the 1983 WCC Vancouver Assembly statement on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation. Unless there is peace in Taiwan, there cannot be peace in the world. Unless there is justice for the people of Taiwan, there cannot be justice around the world.

Today’s Taiwan calls for new and different models of ecumenical partnership. Joint analysis, regular sharing of information, framing shared advocacy roles are essential partnership ingredients to avoid misunderstanding and overcome the hurt of the past.

The exploration of these pressing issues along with a sharing of the variety of responses to Taiwan’s current challenges and its rich gifts will help the ecumenical movement to affirm and give thanks to God for the life and witness of the PCT. In reflecting together the prophetic role of the Church and the meaning of a mutual covenant as partners in God’s vineyard will allow the people of Taiwan to speak from the heart. The TEF will be a rich learning process for the Taiwanese participants to continue to benefit from the input and challenge of their ecumenical partners who would bring a wide-ranging spectrum of concerns, including social, political, economic, cultural, gender and ecological issues.

**Proposed Terms of Reference (ToR)
Taiwan Ecumenical Forum for Justice and Peace**

1. Name

The name shall be “Taiwan Ecumenical Forum for Justice and Peace” and shall hereafter be referred to as the “Taiwan Ecumenical Forum” (TEF).

2. Nature of Organization

TEF will serve as a cooperative endeavor of the ecumenical movement in accompanying the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) mission priority for justice and peace in Taiwan, and in East Asia. As the PCT seeks to be faithful to God’s calling to identify with the suffering of its people, and to give an account of its faith (1 Peter 3:15), it seeks the support of its partner churches, regional, global mission and ecumenical agencies. TEF represents an ecumenical quest and pilgrimage for peace and justice in Taiwan, East Asia and beyond due to the serious regional security challenges and their implications for world peace. As we attempt this journey together, TEF is also mindful that the WCC is on a pilgrimage of justice and peace and we pray that we will share lessons along the way for mutual enrichment. TEF is established in the spirit of the ecumenical accompaniment programs such as the Ecumenical Forum on Korea (EFK), or Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) and the Colombian Peace Process.

3. Objectives

The Taiwan Ecumenical Forum aims to:

- Strengthen and widen (journey together) ecumenical participation in the pilgrimage for justice and peace in North East Asia with Taiwan as a case study in conflict management and resolution;
- Promote effective cooperation on the basis of mutual trust and transparency through sharing of resources and experience in the ecumenical community;
- Serve as a platform of common ecumenical action and advocacy in solidarity with the PCT, as it seeks national dignity, national sovereignty and a Taiwanese society built upon a solid foundation of love, justice and mercy;
- Mobilize and broaden ecumenical and church support for the transitional justice process for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and victim rights (e.g. the martial law era) in the context of the global ecumenical commitments;
- Accompany and support actions on various levels in exploring and promoting new ecumenical and interchurch collaboration within Taiwan; and
- Support PCT priorities for renewing relationships with the Chinese churches and the China Christian Council.

4. Tasks and Functions

The Taiwan Ecumenical Forum shall have the following tasks and functions:

- a) Initiate dialogue and cooperation among participating churches, ecumenical bodies, and church agencies for common action for justice and peace in East Asia with specific emphasis on Taiwan;

- b) Gather and mobilize material, technical, and financial resources for advocacy for the TEF process;

- c) Ensure mutual transparency and accountability for effective work;

- d) Develop and maintain systematic communications among TEF participants.

5. Steering Group

The Steering Group (SG) co-conveners are Chris Ferguson, General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and Collin Cowan, General Secretary of the Council for World Mission (CWM). Other SG members represent PCT, Mission 21, WSCF, Berliner Missionswerk, Presbyterian Church in Canada, United Reformed Church, United Church of Christ in Japan, and Korean and Philippine partner churches.

Broader participation is welcomed and will be considered by the SG.

The key role of the SG is to guide the TEF process in the fulfilment of its objectives, tasks and functions.

6. Meetings

After the initial meeting of the TEF, the Steering Group shall seek opportunities to gather ecumenical partners from time to time in pursuit of the TEF agenda as set out in the ToR.

7. Finance

Meetings will be self-financed with all costs shared. When meeting in Taiwan, the PCT will host the TEF for hotel, food and local transportation costs. The SG and TEF activities will be supported by project funding and voluntary contributions.

8. Other

Any other agenda not specified herein shall be decided by the SG.

9. Timeline

TEF is to be assessed every three years to evaluate its ongoing relevance and impact.



For all updated information about the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum, please visit our website: <http://english.pct.org.tw/tef>