

Our Work in 2023

“In the service of democracy,
peace and development”

A Peak Into HSF's Unification Work

Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Korea supports the process of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), this includes regional development, in which the border region (DMZ) is especially focused upon. In the People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), HSF Korea attempts to contribute to the peaceful development of the region through activities aiming at international integration and cooperation.

PyeongChang Odae-san Peace Dialogue 2023

In February, the PyeongChang Odae-san Peace Dialogue, a voluntary initiative of civil society actors to follow up on the PyeongChang Peace Forum, took place. On February 16, in the seventh session on the culture of peace, eco-peace, and the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) on the Korean Peninsula, Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, informed participants about HSF Korea's activities concerning birds and biodiversity conservation on the Korean Peninsula.

Publication: Green Détente for Inter-Korean Relations

Dr. Choi Hyunah, senior researcher at HSF Korea Dr. Ryu Ji-Sung from the Korea Legislation Research Institute published an issue paper on Green Détente for the development of inter-Korean relations, and the direction of policy-legal cooperation. Green Détente aims to establish a foundation for peaceful unification by promoting green peace zones in border areas and by fostering trust through cooperation, especially in the field of environment, that addresses shared environmental issues such as fine dust, natural disasters, and resource scarcity.

“Reconciliation and Conflict in Northeast Asia and Europe”

On April 7, HSF Korea conducted a cooperative seminar on the topic “Reconciliation and Conflict in Northeast Asia and Europe” at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of HSF Korea held a lecture on “Franco-German and German-Polish Reconciliation and Lessons from Europe”, in which he looked back at the reconciliation between people, that for a long time had seen each other as archenemies, such as Germany and France, and Germany and Poland. He stressed the role of both sides in the initiation of a reconciliation process and the potential of youth networks in fostering mutual exchange and cultural understanding. The seminar was attended by scholars who have studied in German-speaking countries as well as students.



Special Lecture at the International Policy Forum

On May 16, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of HSF Korea, gave a presentation on his experiences in working with North Korea to the International Relations Forum of the National Assembly, one of the most prestigious and prolific study groups in the National Assembly for staffers, members, researchers etc.



Looking back at the first decade of the reign of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, estimated the current economic and humanitarian situation as very serious. Dialogue and humanitarian programs could go on after a re-opening of the country after corona, but it is questionable how the framework conditions for such activities will be.

Unification Experts' Meeting at Suwon Ajou University

On May 12, Ajou University in Suwon organized a conference comparing unification experiences of Germany, China and Taiwan, and Korea. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea, held a presentation about the lessons of the German division and unification for the Korean peninsula. He highlighted Germany's difficulty with social integration issues, regional conflicts, and cultural heterogeneity during its process of reunification, and argued that a prior increase of civil level exchanges could help prepare for unification.

The 1st German-Korean Unification Forum

HSF Korea and the Korea Institute for Peace and Cooperation held the First German-Korean Unification Forum on May 17. Special guest was MP Andreas Scheuer, CEO of Asia Bridge and former German Federal Minister of Transport. Scheuer praised South Korea's economic development and expressed the need for unification for the sake of the North Korean citizens. With a comparison to East Germans after reunification, Scheuer stressed the importance of not making North Koreans feel a sense of loss after unification as did many East Germans.



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Inter-Korean Border Region Cooperation Workshop

From June 1 to 2, KINU hosted a workshop on cooperation in the Inter-Korean border region. The invited experts discussed new cooperation models for the Inter-Korean border area, with a focus on mainly water, forest, and marine. These green fields could lead not only to transforming inter-Korean border areas into green peace zones but also to establishing joint responses to climate change. Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, also joined the workshop and discussed the development of a new model between the two Koreas.



2023 Unification Health Care Leadership Academy

On June 20, 2023, the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies of the Seoul National University organized a Unification Health Care Leadership Academy. HSF Korea also supported this academy, and this year Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, participated and elaborated on the SDGs and North Korea's climate crisis response.



The 24th World Korea Forum 2023

From June 29 to 30, HSF Korea participated in the 24th World Korea Forum in Vientiane, Laos, organized by the Korea Global Foundation. The forum provided an excellent platform for international experts to exchange ideas on the topic of "Regionalism and Globalization in East Asia: Politics, Security, Economy, and Development." HSF Project Manager Ms. Reinecke gave a presentation on "Peacebuilding through international cooperation", giving some insights into HSF cooperation projects.



Publication: Article in the Korea Journal

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, resident representative of HSF Korea, and Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, published a research paper with Prof. Woo-Kyun Lee, Korea University, who has worked with HSF Korea in the field of environment before. The article (Vol. 23, issue no. 2) is titled "Ecological Cooperation beyond the DMZ on the Korean Peninsula: Birds Know No Man-made Borders". The study discusses the importance of the DMZ as a conversation area. It suggests possible inter-Korean and wider regional cooperation regarding the ecological importance of the Han River Estuary for birds as well as other wildlife species and their habitats.

The 8th Korea-Germany Unification Forum

Organized by HSF Korea and Korea Institute for Peace and Cooperation, the 8th Korea-Germany Unification Forum was held on July 27, at the Korea Press Center. The forum reflected on the past 70 Years after the armistice agreement and discussed future tasks for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of HSF Korea gave opening remarks and shared his insights on Inter-Korean cooperation during a round table session.



The 38th Korean Unification Forum

Under the topic "A New Approach to North Korean Human Rights Issues, the 38th Korean Unification Forum in Seoul was held on August 1. It addressed the heavy focus on these issues in the Yoon administration's unification policy. At the forum, approaches to peacebuilding and human rights worldwide and on the Korean Peninsula were compared and Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger of HSF Korea closed the forum with some comparative remarks on the German and Korean unification experience.



The 39th Korean Unification Forum

On September 1, the 39th Korean Unification Forum, organized by the Institute for Peace Studies in cooperation with HSF Korea, took place. Discussed were the results of the trilateral summit at Camp David and North Korea's foreign policy. Thomas Schäfer, former German ambassador to North Korea, highlighted Germany's and the EU's policy of critical engagement towards North Korea and advised it to be continued. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of HSF Korea, made the closing remarks.

The Han River Peace Festival Peace Conference 2023

On September 6, the Han River Peace Festival committee hosted a Peace Conference to discuss the peaceful use of the Han River neutral area, as well as the Green Détente policy and the Incheon initiative in the Pan-Yellow Sea. Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, informed participants about HSF's conservation and ecological cooperation beyond the border projects, such as surveys along the Han River Estuary.



KINU's International Expert workshop

Mr. Hartmut Koschyk, former MP, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, and Mr. Young-Soo Kim from HSF Korea attended the Korea Institute for National Unification's international expert workshop on September 21, and had a meeting with its president, Dr. Chun Sig Kim.



Presentation at the National Assembly

On September 25, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, representative of HSF Korea, held a presentation on the second session of the international symposium on developing strategies to strengthen the health system in North Korea. In his presentation on international cooperation for climate crisis mitigation and adaptation in North Korea, Prof. Dr. Seliger elaborated on HSF Korea's projects with North Korea in the clean energy, forestry, and health sector.

SPN News Interview

On October 16, SPN News published an article based on their interview with Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, resident representative of HSF Korea. In the interview, Prof. Dr. Seliger addressed the meaning of international cooperation regarding the climate crisis of North Korea and the reconciliation of the two Koreas in nature. He stated: "Now people in Germany enjoy nature by taking a walk and riding bicycles in the 'Green belt' area. I hope that the two Koreas can overcome the division like that."



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2023 Yellow Sea Peace Forum in Incheon

The 2023 Yellow Sea Peace Forum took place on October 19, in Incheon. The second session had the theme "Lessons from German Unification and Reflection on Unification", matching the 140th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Korea and Germany. The 2023 forum marked the fifth edition of the Yellow Sea Peace Forum. The Yellow Sea Peace Forum is an academic event that brings together experts to discuss ways to achieve peaceful reunification in the Yellow Sea region, which borders North Korea in the West, and to gather opinions from local and international experts and civil society to spread consensus on reunification in the region. Mr. Kim Young-soo, project manager of HSF Korea, participated in the event and discussed reflective reunification and the lessons of German reunification with other experts.



The Catholic Korea Peace Forum 2023

The Catholic Korea Peace Forum 2023 brought together influential figures from the Catholic community in the United States, South Korea, and Japan to discuss the role of religion in promoting peace and mitigating conflicts in Northeast Asia. Addressed were the escalating tensions in the region. After a conference on the first day, October 26, participants visited the Inter-Korean border, the Joint Security Area (JSA) on day 2.

On the third day, participants attended a Holy Mass at the Hiroshima World Peace Memorial Cathedral and visited the Hiroshima Peace Park and Museum.



The 2023 Unification and Cultural Policy Forum

On November 22, the 2023 Unification and Cultural Policy Forum on the topic "2023, a new understanding of unification", took place. The forum was jointly organized by the Korea Culture and Tourism Institute and HSF Korea. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, HSF Korea representative, held a presentation about the present and future of North Korea, with a focus on North Korea's reopening after the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed the need for the resumption of especially humanitarian projects.



Dr. Hyunah Choi, Senior researcher at the HSF Korea Office, stressed how the lack of contact and exchange with North Korea and North Korea's continuous military activity foster a negative image. Against the background of various projects by HSF, Dr. Choi sees potential in cooperation and exchange through projects concerning the environment and ecological conservation, as nature knows no borders.

The Global Dialogue on Korean Peninsula Unification

The Global Dialogue on Korean Peninsula Unification, co-hosted by the Peaceful Unification Advisory Council and Yonhap News Agency, was held on November 23. It focused on internal cooperation for freedom, peace, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger and Dr. Hyunah Choi from HSF Korea participated as speakers, sharing opinions on the Audacious initiative and Green Détente. They discussed the environment for inter-Korean relations and multilateral cooperation amid current risks and global security issues.



The 40th Korean Unification Forum

On November 30, the 40th Korean Unification Forum, a cooperative project between HSF Korea and the Institute Peace Affairs, took place in Busan under the title "The Korean Peninsula in the Hyper-Connected Era through the 4th Industrial Revolution". Discussed were changes in the security constellation based on developments in AI and IT and resulting policy changes in Northeast Asia and beyond. Kim Young-Soo, project manager of HSF Korea opened the forum.

