



Taiwan forum highlights importance of ecumenical relations

It was a chance visit to a down-town Taipei park that really brought home the reality of Taiwan's social justice situation for Rev Phil King.

The Global Mission Coordinator was in Taiwan in November last year for the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF), hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). The three-day gathering in Hsinchu, which hosted ecumenical partners from around the world, was promoted as being “a prophetic call to journey together with the PCT in pursuit of justice and peace for the people of Taiwan and Asia-Pacific”.

“I had some free time in Taipei before heading to the meeting, so I went for a walk to the nearby 228 Peace Park,” says Phil. “While there, I read about a massacre that occurred on 28 February 1947, ushering in a period of martial law that lasted for 40 years, known as the White Terror Era. During this period of Taiwan's history, thousands were killed and imprisoned.”

That number included many from PCT, including General Secretary Rev Dr CM Kao who was jailed for more than four years in the '70s for harbouring a political dissident.

Although it was Phil's third visit to Taiwan, he admits he knew very little of the political history of this country of 23 million.

“I had only recently begun to know more about the extent of Taiwan's international isolation. I didn't understand how serendipitous that visit to Peace Park was, and how significant it was in terms of the theme of TEF. The forum largely focused on peace and justice issues stemming from that period of history, to help strengthen and widen ecumenical participation in the pilgrimage for justice and peace in North East Asia with Taiwan as a case study in conflict management and resolution.”



Global Mission Coordinator Phil King was inspired by his visit to the Taiwan Peace Park 228.

TEF also called for solidarity with Taiwan's indigenous people and with the PCT as it seeks national dignity and national sovereignty for Taiwan.

In fact, Phil says the welcome address of PCT General Secretary Rev Lyim Hong-Tiong at the TEF stressed the point that “Taiwan is experiencing the most severe isolation of its history”.

“Taiwan has no access to the UN and we discussed many other examples of China's bullying tactics. The PCT is quite isolated domestically, due largely to its social justice stance and political views. It has been criticised for its political activism and has long been alienated from Taiwan's other denominations due to ideological differences.”

In fact, almost all participants at the TEF were from overseas churches and organisations. It's why ecumenical relationships for PCT are so important, added Phil.

“These relationships and international friendships have been described as a window to the world for Taiwan. Walking alongside the PCT cannot be done without understanding the unique context of Taiwan and the PCT's commitment to radical engagement in that context.”

This visit was, says Phil, an opportunity to reconnect with the PCT and make plans to work more closely together.

One of the key outcomes of the November forum for Phil and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

(PCANZ) is the meeting he held with PCT youth and ecumenical leaders.

“Arrangements have been made for our Church to host an Ecumenical Youth Exchange Programme (EYEP) in July this year. This will involve a team of young adults from the PCT who will spend two weeks in New Zealand being hosted by our congregations. They will participate in youth ministry programmes and be guests at PYM's national youth leaders' training weekend, Connect.”

It's an added bonus that Connect is being held at Te Aka Puaho's Te Maungarongo marae in Ohope, says Phil.

“Taiwan's indigenous population (sometimes referred to as Austronesian) have an affinity with Maori and Pacific peoples, and it will be meaningful for the Taiwanese youth to be hosted on the marae. We are also hoping to host a delegation of youth leaders from the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu at the same time who will share in a multicultural programme with the PCT youth, culminating in the Connect weekend. I'm excited about the possibilities for developing programmes like this with our global mission partners.”

It's also hoped the visit will be reciprocated by the Taiwanese, with PCT hosting a New Zealand Presbyterian youth team sometime in 2020.

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