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South Korean Mission Groups Re-Strategize for High-Risk Areas

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Top Korean Christian and mission-sending agencies – including the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), the Korea World Mission Association (KWMA), and the Korea Evangelical Fellowship (KEF) – met recently for a series of discussions on changes needed to improve the safety of South Korean missions overseas.

Overall, the leaders agreed that evangelism needs to continue in hostile locations, but more preparation and risk-assessment is needed before a short- or long-term team is sent out. Preparation includes pre-screening applicants, more training on principles behind short-term engagement, holding security briefings, working more closely with the host country, and scheduling a debriefing after the trip.

“The reality is if we stop sending Christian workers to risky areas there would be a lot of places where we couldn’t send them,” said the Rev. Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe, the World Evangelical Alliance international direc-

tor, to The Christian Post on Friday. “And that is not part of our mandate.”

Tunnicliffe was in South Korea Sept. 13-17 for several conferences including those concerning changes to South Korean overseas mission. The small nation of South Korea is the world’s second most missionary-sending country following the United States.

The recent meetings were held after a team of twenty-three Christian volunteers was abducted by Taliban militants on July 19 as their bus drove through Afghanistan’s insurgency-prone Ghazni province.

*Michelle Vu,
Christian Post Reporter*

Over the course of the hostages’ nearly six weeks of captivity, two male captives were killed. The leader of the group, Bae Hyung-kyu, was found dead on July 25, and the body of 29-year-old Shim Sung-min was found July 30.

The remaining twenty-one workers were eventually released in a series of handovers in August after the Taliban and the South Korean government struck a deal that included the withdrawal of Korean troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year and Seoul promising to pull out and bar all Christian mission groups from Afghanistan.

In the aftermath of the hostage crisis, Korean churches experienced a sense of humility, realizing their mission tactics have

caused significant problems for Korean Christians and for the Korean government, according to Tunnicliffe. Korean churches have received a backlash from the broader culture following the incident while the Korean government has been strongly criticized for its handling of the hostage negotiations.

The evangelical leader said he thinks the incident will have a short-term impact on the Korean mission movement.

“But in the long-term I don’t think it will have a detrimental impact in the sense that they will send less people,” added Tunnicliffe. “I think they will focus more on the ongoing training, equipping people, and working more as a collaborative effort with the international Christian community.”

The WEA head estimates that it will take weeks, if not months, to lay the groundwork for the best guidelines for mission efforts. <<



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