PRESS RELEASE.  

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A Korean Peace Initiative - the Kiwi Connection

Last Sunday – International Women’s Peace and Disarmament Day – 30 international women including such luminaries as feminist Gloria Steinem and two female Noble Peace prize Laureates, crossed over the DMZ from North Korea into South Korea.

Their demand? A declaration of peace on the Korean peninsula.

Surprisingly, Kiwis set the precedent and helped bring this about.

In August 2013 a team of Kiwi motorcyclists led by Gareth and Jo Morgan made history when they rode from Mt. Paektu in the North, across the DMZ and down to Mt. Halla on the island of Jeju of the South of the peninsula.

This triggered the formation of WomenCrossDMZ.org, a group of female activists who are committed to women catalysing an end to the Korean War. Their objective is replacement of the 1953 Korean War Armistice with an internationally agreed upon peace settlement.

Their first step in this campaign has been to follow in the footsteps of the Kiwis with a DMZ crossing to draw attention to the issue.

The Morgan motorcycle team was able to ride across the DMZ because of the efforts of the NZ DPRK Society and South Korean based explorer Kiwi Roger Shepherd who escorted them through the North Korean section. In 2011 the Society facilitated Shepherd to visit Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. He returned two times and spent months tramping and camping in the backblocks photographing hallowed mountains, some of which had not been photographed for many decades. Subsequently he produced a photo-art book capturing mountains of both North & South Korea.

Shepherd introduced the Morgans to key North Korean officials who enthusiastically endorsed the concept of a North – South peninsula long motorcycle ride in the name of peace. These officials negotiated all sorts of bureaucratic hurdles and made it happen.
WomenCrossDMZ were able to draw on this pioneering Kiwi experience to accomplish their DMZ crossing last Sunday.

Secretary of the NZ DPRK Society, Peter Wilson, travelled to North Korea to witness the women’s crossing. He was able accompany them through the Kaesong Industrial Park, deep into the DMZ and watch the women march about a kilometre to the North Korean customs and immigration checkpoint. Apart from media personnel, he was the only non-Korean present to witness the women exit North Korea.

“The departure was an incredibly emotive moment,” he says. “The North Korean women, with tears flowing, were hugging and hugging the international women as they said goodbye. The pain of 10 million artificially and inhumanely separated families was raw for all to see. I too could not hold back the tears.”

Prior to crossing the DMZ a joint declaration, drafted with input from both North and South Korean women, was read at Panmunjom. This affirmed their “commitment to support the desires of the Korean people and all people of conscience around the world to work towards the peaceful reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula.”

WomenCrossDMZ say they will march across the DMZ again next year on May24, but this time from the South to the North.

More Information:

https://www.womencrossdmz.org/
https://www.womencrossdmz.org/press.html
https://www.womencrossdmz.org/endorsements.html