

The human rights prize
in commemoration of Professor Thorolf Rafto

THE RAFTO PRIZE 2000

is being awarded to

KIM DAE JUNG

President of the Republic of Korea (South Korea)

Kim Dae Jung has been awarded the Rafto Prize 2000 for his untiring fight for democracy and human rights. His reform policy in South Korea as well as his policy of conciliation and involvement in the situation in North Korea, better known as "sunshine policy", renders hope for a peaceful and democratic development with respect for fundamental human rights on the entire Korean Peninsula.

Kim Dae Jung

Kim Dae Jung has paid a high price for his lifelong political commitment. He has been under house arrest 55 times, been imprisoned for six years and lived in exile during two periods of time. Furthermore he has suffered torture and assassination assaults and been sentenced to death twice. Both times, owing to the international press, he has been saved just in time. Despite **enormous** amounts of adversity and suffering, he has never given up his fight for democracy and respect for fundamental human rights.

"I abhor mistaken politics, but do not hate any individual," Kim said in 1978, after three years of imprisonment owing to his opposition to the dictatorship. Kim Dae Jung believes that the road to freedom is impossible without forgiveness and tolerance. As president he has displayed his belief by choosing to forgive the former rulers who persecuted him and sentenced him to death when he belonged to the opposition. His policy of forgiveness is a visible expression of freedom from hatred and fear. These values fill people with hope and pave the road ahead for a new generation of politicians in Korea as well as in the rest of Asia.

Kim Dae Jung is a visionary political leader who converts his ideas concerning democracy and human rights into real action. At the centre of Kim's political policies we find the mission of how to guarantee peace on the Korean Peninsula – the last area on the earth which is still distinguished by cold war. In spite of considerable opposition in South Korea, he has been imbued by the courage and power needed to enforce a policy of reconciliation and involvement with North Korea. This is a policy of small steps which slowly, but steadily may help to open up one of the world's most closed countries.

Kim Dae Jung has been strongly engaged in the building of democracy and peace in Asia. In 1994, when he was still an oppositional politician, he took the initiative in establishing the

"Forum of Democratic Leaders in the Asia-Pacific". His considerable contribution in conflict imbued areas like Burma, Indonesia and East Timor has harvested approval from, among others, the Rafto and the Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi and the secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. Kim is firmly convinced that democracy is a fundamental premise for religious freedom, peace and prosperity. He disagrees with those who claim that a Western interpretation of democracy can not be transferred to Asia, and he thinks he finds support for a democratic vision in Confucianism and respect for the individual in Buddhism. At the same time Kim Dae Jung, who is a Christian, is of the opinion that the values of the East can contribute to a positive renewal of Western culture.

Korea –50 years of cold war and internal antagonism

North and South Korea fought a bitter civil war from 1950 to 1953, and a formal peace treaty has never been signed. During the last 50 years the Korean Peninsula has been a powder keg, strategically positioned in the sphere of interest between China, Russia, the USA and Japan. The tension along the demilitarized zone is still intense. The division of Korea into two states with families split in the North and the South has been and is still a national wound.

During the last 30 years South Korea has been governed by a general, hidden behind a civil facade. The cold war between the North and the South has been used as an argument for the lack of freedom of speech (including that of the press) limited political rights and the introduction of severe security laws. The inauguration of Kim Dae Jung as president of South Korea in 1998 indicated a historic crossroads because it was the first time that a politician from the opposition was elected president at a democratic election. At the 1997 election Kim Dae Jung's party, the National Congress of New Politics, did not get a majority in the National Assembly. Kim's political power base is consequently fragile, and there are even more obstacles along the road, which may restrain the government's program for social and political reforms and for rapprochement with North Korea.

In the North Kim Il Sung, "The Great Leader", ruled for nearly 50 years. After his death in 1994 his son, Kim Jong II, followed in his footsteps. In the late nineties the world became informed about the food shortage and famine in the country. These problems were mainly caused by an unsuccessful policy in the North during the last 50 years. Famine combined with a total lack of basic human rights has forced several hundred thousand North Koreans to flee to China, where their living conditions are grotesque and they have no legal rights.

UN's evasive role

The UN High Commissioner for refugees has neither granted a legal status to the protection of North Korean refugees, nor prohibited China from sending refugees back to North Korea by force and to an uncertain destiny. This fact contributes to a further aggravation of the refugees' situation. The Rafto Foundation regard it as a paradox which should be placed on the political agenda immediately.