

UWC in North Korea

In the first week of March, a group of ten students from Li Po Chun UWC visited North Korea in an attempt to establish ongoing friendships with North Korean students. Accompanied by the Principal of LPCUWC, Dr Stephen Codrington, the group found that they were the first foreign students to visit North Korea...ever.

North Korea is possibly the world's most isolated nation, and definitely the only country in the world to resist globalisation as a national priority. In a country where the government controls all information, where mobile phones are banned, and where phone calls and mail are monitored, the LPCUWC initiative was intended as a gesture towards building a more secure future in the Asian region.

One of the highlights of the trip was a visit to a high school in Pyongyang – the Moranbong Secondary School No.1. When the LPCUWC group arrived, they found that their North Korean counterparts were on study leave in preparation for forthcoming examinations, but despite this a large group came into school especially to meet them.

“As part of sharing our cultures with the North Koreans our students had dressed in their national costumes for the visit, and from the reactions of our hosts, it seems

“We landed at Pyongyang Airport in an old Soviet plane. I adjusted my watch one hour forward, but in reality we went back fifty years”

Ricardo, Guatemala

certain they had never seen anything like these national dresses before,” says Dr Codrington. “The teachers and students then gave us a number of demonstration lessons and a few musical performances, which the LPCUWC students responded to with some dances, songs and stories of their own.”

During their stay the students also visited the demilitarised zone (DMZ) and the border with South Korea at Panmunjom. The opportunity to step right up to the world's most heavily armed border and see it ‘from the other side’ was an experience that made a profound impact.

“I remember a very sad moment at the border between North and South Korea. Our school, which comprises students from all over the world, is a symbol of unity, whereas the border separating North and South Korea is a sign of failure, of disunity,” says Yahya from Tanzania.

For all involved, the trip was an

extraordinary experience, and in the spirit of UWC, one that has offered a far greater understanding of another culture and history that is normally hidden from the rest of the world.

“Before my time in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), I had a strong impression that North Korea was a country of dictatorship, famine and propaganda, because that is how it is pictured in our media. A country with an Eternal President (Kim Il Sung) who died 11 years ago, and very strict regulations monitoring everything – even one's hairstyle,” says Lisa, from the Netherlands.

“Bush named North Korea as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’, portraying it as a danger to us all. But the people we spoke to in North

“A colonel in the Korean People's Army explained to me that this wall is like a belt that is too tight, that presses into the belly of a person and is painful”

Mael, France

Korea seemed very sad about the separation of their country and called the South Koreans their brothers.”

“The visit is being followed up in the hope that this will lead to a visit to Hong Kong by a delegation of educators and (hopefully) students from North Korea,” explains Dr Codrington. “As such contact with North Korea is unprecedented, however, the pathway towards establishing trust will be a long one, and patience will be required.”

