

Acceptance Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

**Upon Receiving an Honourary Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science**

**Soongsil University
Seoul, South Korea**

October 11, 2003

Honourable Chairman Lee Won Seol (Board of Directors), President Lee Joong, Dean Kwak Hee Ro (Graduate School), Dean Hwang Sunwook (External Affairs), honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you very much for inviting me to Soongsil University today, and for conferring on me the Honourary Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science. It is with great humility that I accept this honour.

I would first like to bring greetings from the Senate of Canada and from the University of Toronto.

Distinguished guests, over the last five years in the Senate of Canada, I have been involved in issues of human rights, peace in the Korean peninsula, as well as the rest of Asia.

Being a Canadian born in Asia and having experienced living in a war-torn country, I have an affinity to the issues, particularly in this part of the world. My family was in China during the Second World War. We were refugees who left Hong Kong for free China after the British Colony surrendered, and we spent the next four years running from the approaching Japanese invasion.

I have very vivid memories of events during the war, of not having the daily necessities, of traveling on top of cargoes by transport trucks because they were the only available form of transportation, if you were lucky. We climbed on top of the cargo by rope ladder, and for the small child that I was, it was not easy. We had to hang on for dear life when the trucks were on the move. The only food that was easily transportable and nutritious was hard boiled eggs. The thought of them still reminds me of

that period of my life. I never had a toy as a child, and neither did I have shoes. I wore wooden clogs because leather was reserved for boots for the soldiers.

After 1949, China was divided similarly to Korea in the early 1950s. I can say that I understand how Koreans feel. Our experiences influence the way we think. From my experiences, I learnt never to take anything for granted, and I am always thankful for what we have every day. As a result, it is important to me to contribute in improving equality and human rights, and peace among peoples, particularly in North-East Asia, this being one of the most politically explosive regions today.

I have been reading about the refugee situations across the Chinese border from North Korea, and how the Chinese soldiers round up the escapees and return them to North Korea. It reminds me of what used to be called “the boomerang express” that the Hong Kong government had to return refugees who were caught crossing the border from China into Hong Kong. Hearing about desperate acts committed by desperate people in the China border area with North Korea is like a replay of what I used to hear when I was young.

The recent summit meeting of South and North Korea, Russia, China, Japan and the United States is an attempt to solve the aggravating situation of the North Korean weapons issues. There are indications that these talks will continue.

I believe threats of war cannot deal with the famine and human rights problems in North Korea, and that’s why many non-government organizations (NGOs) are reaching out to help to improve the living conditions of the population there.

From my understanding of Korean history, I know some of you have experienced similar horrors of war and the life of refugees as we did during the Second World War. We understand the pain of separation of families. We should all be involved in promoting human rights around the world, in North-East Asia, and in particular, in the Korean peninsula.

Economically, East Asia is one of the fastest growing areas in the world. Just look at Korea as an example - we cannot but be overwhelmed by the achievements in advanced technology that we have seen in just

over forty years. East Asia is the region that will be driving the world economy within the next ten to fifteen years. Therefore, peace in the Korean peninsula is vital to North-East Asian stability and economic development.

We are all aware that there are many conflicts in the world, and there are many great minds engaged in solving them through diplomatic means. The fact that Canada established diplomatic relations with North Korea is certainly a move in the right direction, even though the move forward has since stalled because of the nuclear threat. However, I do believe Canada can play an important role in the peace engagement in the Korean peninsula.

For my part, as an Asian Canadian parliamentarian and educator, with my involvement with the Canada-DPR Korea Association, and with the Women, Peace and Security Committee, I have my role to play in Canada's contribution to the improvement of the relationship between North and South Korea, between the Korean Peninsula and North America, and to peace and prosperity in North-East Asia. I'm certain that many of you at Soongsil University are working towards human rights, and peace in North-East Asia, which is so vital to the economic development in this region.

Finally, as an honorary member of the Soongsil University, and as the Chancellor of the University of Toronto, I will do my best to develop a mutually co-operative and beneficial relationship between the two universities.

Thank you once again for your invitation. It is indeed an honour to be part of the Soongsil University family.