

# Northern Asia-Pacific Division of the General Conference Seventh-day Adventist Church

## Biblical Research Committee Report and Recommendations



## Theology of Ordination and the Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry

December 17, 2013

1  
2 **The Study of the Theology of Ordination and Ordination of**  
3 **Women**  
4

5 The Northern Asia-Pacific Division's Biblical Research Committee met June 3-5, 2013 at  
6 Hong Kong Adventist College to discuss the theology of ordination. There were eight  
7 papers presented by scholars from across the Division. While our topic was a theology  
8 of ordination, the focus of the papers was specifically on the subject of the ordination of  
9 women to the gospel ministry.  
10

- 11 1. *"Laying on of Hands in the New Testament"* by Richard Sabuin of AIIAS  
12 2. *"Women's Ordination in a Perspective of the Old Testament"* by Lee Jong-Keun of SU  
13 3. *"Discussion on the Women's Ordination in the History of Korean Protestant Churches."*  
14 by Kuk Hun Lee of SU  
15 4. *"Pastoral Theological Implications on the Issue of Women's Ordination for the Ministry*  
16 *of the Local Church of the Seventh-day Adventist in Korea"* by B. H. Jang of SU  
17 5. *"Women's Ordination from New Testament Perspectives: Lexical Case Study with a*  
18 *Few Women"* by Hong Pal Ha of SGC  
19 6. *"Apostle Paul on Women's Ordination"* by William Lin of TAC  
20 7. *"Women's Ordination from Chinese Perspective"* by Samuel Chiu of HKAC  
21 8. *"Some Missiological Arguments on the Theology of Ordination"* by Sung-Ik Kim of SU  
22

23 At that time we also carefully reviewed the draft version of the theology of ordination  
24 consensus statement. Our NSD BRC voted recommendations to be delivered to the GC  
25 Theology of Ordination Committee. In July 2013 a revised version of the consensus  
26 statement was voted by the GC TOSC committee.  
27

28 We, the NSD Biblical Research Committee, are in agreement with this revised document.  
29

30 Here is an excerpt that has helped to guide the ordination study for our Biblical  
31 Research Committee here in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division.  
32

33 "Seventh-day Adventists understand ordination, in a biblical sense, as the  
34 action of the Church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called  
35 and equipped for local and global Church ministry . . . While ordination  
36 contributes to Church order, it neither conveys special qualities to the  
37 persons ordained nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith  
38 community."  
39

40 Our NSD Biblical Research Committee also met December 16-17, 2013. We reviewed  
41 and discussed the documents produced for the GC Theology of Ordination Committee  
42 that met in July of 2013. We spent a majority of our time discussing the papers on the

1 Biblical texts that pertain to the topic. This discussion and prayer has formed the basis  
 2 of our conclusions and recommendations that will follow.

3  
 4 Uniquely in the NSD we have a large percentage of women who are leading churches.  
 5 God has blessed women to grow several of the largest Adventist churches in the world.  
 6 Women in pastoral ministry are leading many of our large and effective churches within  
 7 our Division.

8  
 9 Here is the estimate of how many women are involved in pastoral ministry in the NSD.  
 10 Please see the number of women in pastoral ministry, the number of churches being  
 11 served by women, and the number of members being served by women pastors.

Field	Women Pastors	Total Pastors	Churches with Women Pastors	Total Churches & Companies	Members served by Women Pastors	Total Members
Korean Union Conference	12	895	10	899	3,608	235,721
Japan Union Conference	6	81	8	149	1,917	15,242
Mongolian Mission	1	18	1	10	30	1,972
Taiwan Conference	13	78	15	85	440	6,132
Hong Kong Macau Conference	13	42	12	21	547	5,020
China (Unorganized Territory*)	3,176**	5,293	2,740**	4,566	248,592**	414,320
Totals	3,221	6,407	2,782	5,730	252,500	678,407

14  
 15 Total NSD membership is now 671,158  
 16 Estimated membership led by women 252,500  
 17 38% of membership in NSD  
 18

19 \*Within the UT Territory the pastors include a few who have formal theological training  
 20 from an Adventist school. Many have some training through seminars and certificate  
 21 programs. A large majority of those who are serving churches in pastoral ministry have  
 22 not yet had the privilege of formal theological training.

23  
 24 \*\* UT numbers based on estimate that 60% of those serving in pastoral ministry are  
 25 women.  
 26

1 **Abstracts and Excerpts of the Documents presented at the**  
2 **June 2012 NSD BRC**

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4  
5 ***"Laying on of Hands in the New Testament"***  
6 **by Richard Sabuin of AIAS**  
7

8 The laying on of hands is mentioned 20 times in the New Testament. In some cases the  
9 laying on of hands was applied twice to the same person. 8 of these events are for  
10 healing of the sick and Jesus laid hands on both men and women. 4 are in reference to  
11 baptism and two were when Jesus laid hands on small children.  
12

13 There are 6 references to laying on of hands in connection to an appointment to a  
14 specific task (Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-3; 1Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6).  
15

16 "The Seventh-day Adventist church is now practicing ordinations into three different  
17 offices: deacons, elders, and ministers. The NT, however, mentions persons who two  
18 times receive the laying on of hands: first at baptism, and second when appointed to be  
19 apostles, or itinerant elders, or local elders."  
20

21  
22 ***"Women's Ordination in a Perspective of the Old Testament"***  
23 **by Lee Jong-Keun of SU**  
24

25 "Both man and woman were created equal in the beginning in the image of God.  
26 Equality of the sexes is precipitated in the creation of Eve. The word term helpmate  
27 denotes an equal at the side of Adam. Human beings as creatures of God are built on  
28 equality from the beginning."  
29

30 "The Hebrew for helpmate k<sup>e</sup>neged is made of two words. ke meaning "as, like,  
31 according to," and neged meaning "in front of, opposite, against." Both words are "like  
32 opposite him," expressing mutual support and complementary, not as an inferior or  
33 subordinate partner."  
34

35 "God's intended creation order of equality was broken due to human disobedience. The  
36 divine design for humanity is Urzeit extends to Endzeit, meaning "the beginning time  
37 extends to the end time," connoting that the original state of humanity in the  
38 beginning continues to the end. Equality of sexes is the ideal to march for in the present  
39 and succeeding generations."  
40

41 "The cross of Calvary is the apex and the central point of human civilization, in which  
42 God restores humanity to the original status with Him. All are redeemed as one in Christ,  
43 overcoming male dominance and female subordination. The gospel commission  
44 mandates no differentiation, inequality or discrimination in the church.  
45

46 Women ordination in the Old Testament is neither considered nor mentioned at all due  
47 to cultural milieus, which cannot be taken as a biblical reason to bar women from being  
48 ordained in the gospel ministry. The light of the divine design shines step by step in the

1 history of human civilization. The present situation on women rights is the call of the  
2 times just as emancipation of slaves, sexual equality, and women rights to vote have  
3 been in the past. So it seems the same with the issue of ordaining women.”  
4

5 There has been much discussion on women's ordination thus far since 1970s in the  
6 Seventh-day Adventists. Though it is an ongoing issue worldwide, we can consider the  
7 example of women's ordination for elders on this case. This issue seems a matter of  
8 adiaphora, a tolerance of conducts or beliefs not specifically commanded or forbidden  
9 in the Bible, which can be decided for the good of the church, i.e., mission, unity and  
10 wellbeing of the community of Adventist faith. The world church can overcome the  
11 tension caused by this issue and advance to proclaim the everlasting gospel to the  
12 world.”  
13  
14

15 ***"Discussion on the Women's Ordination in the History of Korean Protestant***  
16 ***Churches."***

17 **by Kuk Hun Lee of SU**  
18

19 “After a century of Korean Protestant Church history, finally number of denominations  
20 accepted the women's ordination and as a result female pastors are now positioned.  
21 Furthermore, female's higher status and respect in society allowed them to become un-  
22 refutable element in Korean Church. But despite such needs in reality, assignments  
23 regarding the women's ordination still remain.”  
24

25 A listing of denominations in Korea accepting the ordination of women.

- 26 • Korean Methodist Church
- 27 • The Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea
- 28 • The Presbyterian Church of Korea
- 29 • The Korea Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Church
- 30 • Jesus Korea Holiness Church
- 31 • Korea Evangelical Holiness Church

32  
33 A listing of denominations in Korea denying the ordination of women.

- 34 • The General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in Korea
- 35 • The Korea Baptist convention
- 36 • Seventh-day Adventists

37  
38 “On the other hands, evangelical denominations that haven’t reached the solutions  
39 should provide their full effort to resolve the problem soon. As mentioned, the reason  
40 for women's ordination raising theological debate is because it is often viewed  
41 precipitation of logic with extremely liberal perspective. For such tension be eased, the  
42 women's ordination debate must consider the conservative theology of the Korean  
43 Church in its progression. Because the agreement among the regarding members is  
44 critical in its solution, theologically relevant approach must be taken. Liberal and  
45 progressive arguments will only raise refusal and simply make the problem worse.  
46 Therefore, reconsideration of the female theology from the evangelical perspective is  
47 inevitable.”  
48  
49

1 ***"Pastoral Theological Implications on the Issue of Women's Ordination for the***  
2 ***Ministry of the Local Church of the Seventh-day Adventist in Korea"***  
3 **by B. H. Jang of SU**

4  
5 "Particularly when church growth in Korea approaches stagnation, the decisions of the  
6 Church will be more important than ever."  
7

8 This paper has a quick overview of the history of women in ministry in the Adventist  
9 church beginning in 1881 and the resolution, "Females possessing the necessary  
10 qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set aside by ordination  
11 to the work of the Christian ministry."  
12

13 The author then traces the historical points of this topic up to the present day where the  
14 author states, "surely the issue of women's ordination has not been adequately  
15 addressed or resolved within our community of faith. Rather, silence has been  
16 maintained for the unity of the church."  
17

18 The author then shares information from a study on women and ministry made by  
19 Sahmyook University. It was an on line survey with only 199 respondents of the  
20 224,000 members in the KUC. 63 of these were pastors.  
21

22 Here is a sample of the results directly of interest to our study:  
23

- 24 51.8% - Do you agree that women ministers need ordination to the ministry?  
25 51.8% - Do you agree that women ministers need to be ordained by the laying of hands  
26 on their heads?  
27 58.3% - Do you agree that women ministers may preside at the Lord's Supper?  
28 55.8% - Do you agree that women ministers may baptize?  
29 52.5% - Do you agree that women ministers may ordain new elders?  
30 54.8% - Do you agree that women ministers may ordain new deacons and deaconesses?  
31  
32 71.4% - Do you agree that women ministers may function as chairpersons of church  
33 boards?  
34 61.8% - Are you in favor of women ministers as senior pastors of the local church?  
35 75.9% - Are you in favor of women ministers preaching in the local church?  
36 81.9% - Are you in favor of women ministers making pastoral visits to church members'  
37 houses in the local church?  
38 79.9% - Are you in favor of women ministers being the main speakers for evangelistic  
39 Bible crusades?  
40 85.4% - Do you agree that women ministers may work as professors in a theology  
41 department?  
42

43 This study also urges that unity in the church is very important and a key consideration  
44 in its decisions. The study also urges that "in the present situation of the Church, it  
45 seems to be very necessary for the world church to approach the issue of women's  
46 ordination in different ways than the traditional, conservative approach, such as a  
47 theoretical/theological or a historical/denominational approach, even one based on the  
48 Bible or Spirit of Prophecy."  
49

1 Another point in the paper is, “When the World Church undergoes a process of decision-  
2 making on this issue, the cultural diversity of the people should be considered, with  
3 respect to the local congregations of the church.”  
4

5 Urgency of the mission is also noted in the statement, “While the world Church  
6 maintains an identity of a global church of diversity, it should not neglect to awaken the  
7 local congregations’ passionate conviction as to the nearness of the return of Jesus.  
8 Local church members are taught to actualize the principles of the kingdom in this  
9 present life while they work to hasten the day of Christ’s coming.”  
10

11 “Therefore, the priority and the purpose of the decision-making process of the GC on  
12 this issue should be the unity and growth of the Church, in order to spread the gospel of  
13 Jesus more effectively than before. Most local churches in Korea have been experiencing  
14 severe stagnation for many years. There has been no growth for a long time. Therefore,  
15 this issue should not be dealt with in our Church in too exaggerated a manner, but  
16 should be distributed to each division for discussion and decision, in cooperation with  
17 the unions in its territory, considering the multifarious cultures and customs carefully.  
18 “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all  
19 men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, KJV).”  
20  
21

22 ***“Women’s Ordination from New Testament Perspectives: Lexical Case Study with a  
23 Few Women”***

24 **by Hong Pal Ha of SGC**  
25

26 The author of this document begins with a careful Biblical study of the laying on of hands  
27 as it appears in the New Testament.  
28

29 Secondly, the author studies the case of Priscilla and Phoebe. He argues that both were  
30 leaders in the church and perhaps Priscilla was even more renowned as a leader since  
31 her name is mentioned first. Phoebe is definitely a church leader of high standing.  
32

33 “To sum up, there was no gender bias, at least, in the role of the women in the New  
34 Testament. They were actively engaged in the diverse church activities. Some such  
35 remarkable workers as Priscilla and Phoebe, for instance, could be entitled to “pastor”  
36 as their adequate position. But when we come to a position in the gospel ministry with  
37 official ordination for woman, unfortunately, it is likely that there is no single occasion  
38 or case introduced in the New Testament.”  
39  
40

41 ***“Apostle Paul on Women’s Ordination”***

42 **by William Lin of TAC**  
43

44 “Seventh-day Adventist church’s solution for this matter is what does the Bible say and  
45 how it should be done? Only then will tradition, experience, and theology be considered.”  
46

47 This author looks carefully at the statements by the apostle Paul on women that appear  
48 to oppose them being in ministry. In each passage the author argues that the passages

1 were not meant to exclude women from ministry (1Tim 2:8-15; 1Cor 14:34-36; 1Cor  
2 11:2-16).

3  
4 Interestingly, the author references Chinese authors on the topic that are not normally  
5 available and used by western writers on the subject. These references share the  
6 historical thinking of Christians in Asia.

7  
8 The author concludes, “Therefore women’s call to the gospel ministry is no longer a  
9 issue. The Bible with the testimonial of the Spirit of Prophecy has resolved the problem.  
10 That is, women can serve as pastors n church ministry. Women should be ordained to  
11 Gospel Ministry. It is an urgent need and trend in the church. There should be no gender  
12 differentiation in receiving the call to ministry. Man and women both sere the Lord and  
13 Church.”

14  
15 “Is there gender differentiation in receiving the spiritual gifts? In New Testament,  
16 Romans 12, 1Cor 12, Eph 4, and 1 Pet 4 talk about spiritual gifts. All the texts do not  
17 mention gender differentiation. In other words, anyone can receive the spiritual gifts  
18 regardless of the gender, including the gift of preaching. If a woman had a gift of  
19 preaching, she should not be stopped just because of her gender. Conversely, if a man  
20 did not have the gift of preaching, he should not be given opportunity just because his  
21 gender.”

22  
23

24 ***“Women's Ordination from Chinese Perspective”***  
25 **by Samuel Chiu of HKAC**

26  
27

28 “The basic tension of this study is not to ignore the pros and cons on the issue; instead,  
29 the final attempt is to clarify the appropriate rationale for or against WO, especially  
30 from a Chinese perspective.”

31  
32

33 This study retraces the history of women in ministry in the Adventist church from the  
34 very earliest days of the church. The document speaks of the long history within the  
35 Adventist church of women in evangelism, administration, and pastoral ministry.

36  
37

38 Next, the author shares details of the role and position of women in Chinese society and  
39 its perspective in different cultural parts of China. He also shares the aspect of ordained  
40 ministry that has a long history in the Christian church in China.

41  
42

43 “By the way, Chinese tend to solve problems step by step rather than jump to the other  
44 side of the reading. Because besides WO on local church Elders, and [Local church]  
45 Deaconesses, we received no green light from GC for WO of pastors. Therefore, we start  
46 to consider the allowance or even suggestion from “above” about the “commissioned  
47 ministerial credential . . . No matter the WO on pastors can be approved or not finally, I  
48 believe that the HKMC will look forward to that, while at the same time push the  
49 application of the “commissioned ministerial credential.”

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1 ***"Some Missiological Arguments on the Theology of Ordination"***  
2 **by Sung Ik Kim of SU**  
3

4 "Ordination is the process by which individuals are consecrated; that is, set apart as  
5 clergy to perform various religious rites and ceremonies. In Adventist circles, for the  
6 sake of authorization and church order — but not for reasons of power or ability —  
7 individuals must be ordained in order to preside over religious rituals. These rituals  
8 include baptism and communion as well as funeral and wedding ceremonies. Following  
9 ordination, individuals can then be installed as the pastor of a congregation or parish.  
10 The laying on of hands is the primary component of the ritual of ordination, which is  
11 performed by other pastors: the representatives of the church. In its symbolism,  
12 however, the laying on of hands is one of the most misguided rites in the church, even  
13 though the laying on of hands is included in Hebrews 6:1–2 as one of the six  
14 fundamental doctrines of the early church."

15  
16 The author gives an excellent study of the purpose and meaning of ordination and the  
17 laying on of hands. The head is a symbol of authority while the hands are a symbol of  
18 power.  
19

20 "In the Bible, however, the laying on of hands is used as both a symbolic and formal  
21 method of invoking the Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 34:9; Acts 8:14–19), primarily  
22 connecting with baptisms, confirmations (Numbers 27:15–23; Deuteronomy 34:9),  
23 healing services (Mark 6:5; Luke 13:13), blessings (Gen 27:27), or ordination of priests  
24 (Ex 29:10–19), elders (Numbers 11:16–25), deacons (Acts 6:1–6), and other church  
25 officers (Acts 13:3) — along with a variety of other holy ceremonies."  
26

27 "Ellen G. White pointed out that ordination came to be 'greatly abused' and that  
28 'unwarrantable importance' had become attached to the rite 'as [though] a power  
29 came . . . upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them  
30 for any and all ministerial work.' (AA 162)"  
31

32 "It is important to remember, in fact, that Ellen White held the ordained ministry in the  
33 highest regard. In mentioning Paul and Barnabas' dedication to God by prayer and the  
34 laying on of hands (Acts 13), she notes: "Thus they were authorized by the church, not  
35 only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches,  
36 being invested with full ecclesiastical authority. Thus, to her their ordination was 'a  
37 public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of  
38 the gospel.'"  
39

40 "The laying on of hands is a biblical action; however, there is no biblical mandate  
41 requiring the physical laying on of hands for a particular spiritual ministry."  
42

43 "We need to understand that no magical biblical formulae exist for the ministry of the  
44 church. The laying on of hands has no power in and of itself. Furthermore, it is not a  
45 mandated ritual. The laying on of hands is only used by God when it is performed in  
46 agreement with God's Word."  
47

48 "Many other crucial church issues are not delineated clearly in the Bible. God does not  
49 speak directly to the question of the ordination of women in the New Testament, just as

1 He does not deal directly with the abolition of slavery, vegetarianism, abstinence from  
2 alcohol, and many other issues based on principles allocated in older scriptures. He has,  
3 however, given clear Biblical principles to guide our decision-making. . .”

4  
5 “That being said, no one can apply the Bible literally in an absolutely thorough manner.  
6 This is true not only because there are elements in Scripture directed within specific  
7 cultural situations, but also because there are elements that stand in tension due to  
8 man’s situation in sin. In certain portions of Scripture, polygamy is socially accepted, but  
9 over and against this stands the ideal monogamous marriage relationship in Eden and  
10 the teachings of Jesus. This is also true regarding the practice of slavery militating  
11 against the idea of man’s intrinsic value and integrity, which is a central teaching of  
12 Scripture.”

13  
14 “Our church has already taken courageous stands against slavery and racial prejudice.  
15 God also calls us to return to the Edenic ideal of male-female relationships, which allows  
16 women equal access to the gifts of the Spirit for ministry (Joel 2:28–30; Eph 4:11–13).”

17  
18 Then in conclusion the author states: “The temptation in considering hermeneutical  
19 questions about certain issues is to take the shortcut by focusing on statements dealing  
20 with specific cases rather than on principles derived from the total thrust of the  
21 Scriptures. While it is true that each specific case applies a general principle, that  
22 application may be valid only for that particular context and situation.”

23  
24 “The problem is complicated in that few would argue for making a literalistic  
25 application of the Bible without reference to context. Rather, one must take the Bible as  
26 a whole for the purpose of determining general principles applicable to all times and  
27 what signifies an application of a general principle to a specific time and place. Two  
28 things need to be kept in mind when biblical counsel given in one specific context is  
29 being applied to a contemporary situation: the first is to understand the biblical  
30 teachings correctly; the second is to read while discerning both the historical situation  
31 and the social context in which one lives.”

32  
33 “Ultimately, discussion regarding the theology of ordination should focus primarily on  
34 the meaning of ordination (laying on of hands) connecting with the order of the gospel  
35 as well as the inclusive characteristics of pastoral ministry regardless of gender.”

36  
37

## **Conclusions from the NSD BRC on the Subject of Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Ministry**

1. We agree with the General Conference Theology of Ordination Consensus Statement which shares that ordination is the church recognizing the call of God on the life of an individual for ministry as God will direct. We believe the church can recognize whom God has called, but it is God who determines whom He will call.

2. Based upon our studies in the NSD and our review of the GC TOSC documents we believe that while the Bible does not command women to be ordained to the pastoral ministry, it does not prohibit women's ordination. The Bible supports women in ministry and leadership.

3. Based upon our studies in the NSD and our review of the GC TOSC documents we believe that while Ellen White does not command women to be ordained to the pastoral ministry, she does not prohibit women's ordination. Ellen White supports women in ministry and leadership.

4. We recognize that the Seventh-day Adventist Church historically has had women in leadership and pastoral ministry from its earliest days. We also recognize that throughout the church's history and especially in contemporary times the church has encouraged women to be a part of the mission of the church and to be a part of pastoral ministry.

5. We recognize the fruitful contribution of women to pastoral ministry within our Division noting that a significant number of those leading churches within our field are women.

6. Because of our emphasis on "Mission First" in the NSD we believe that this should be one of the determining considerations on who should be called and ordained (recognized by the church as having the call of God) within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

7. We recognize that our emphasis on "Mission First" will take into consideration the culture where we work and that ordaining women to ministry will bring great blessings to many places within the NSD Territories.

1 **Recommendations from the NSD BRC on the Subject of the**  
2 **Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Ministry**

3  
4  
5 1. We recommend that the World Church place “Mission First” as a priority and that we  
6 focus on sharing the three angels’ messages with the world. This means that we  
7 recommend that both men and women should be encouraged and recognized by the  
8 church through ordination to the pastoral ministry.

9  
10 2. We recommend a “Mission First” approach to the pastoral ministry that allows each  
11 division to determine if ordination of women will be helpful within its local culture.

12  
13 3. We recommend that the Adventist Church educate its members about the historical  
14 importance and its impact gender inclusiveness has had on our church development  
15 and growth since its very beginnings.

16  
17 4. We recommend that the General Conference, divisions, unions, missions, and  
18 conferences develop materials and train our church members about the importance of  
19 gender inclusiveness to the achieving of our mission to our world.

20  
21 5. Since there is such a diversity of approaches to the study of the Scriptures that have  
22 been revealed in the study of the theology of ordination, we recommend that the world  
23 church develop and educate its scholars, educators, and pastors on a more united  
24 hermeneutical approach to Scriptures.

25  
26 6. Knowing that Unity and Gospel order are vital for the future mission of the Seventh-  
27 day Adventist Church, we recommend that the General Conference convene a  
28 committee similar to the General Conference Theology of Ordination Committee to  
29 develop and study ways to maintain unity in the church.

30  
31 7. We propose that at the General Conference Session in 2015 a recommendation be  
32 brought that globally the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry be approved.  
33 We further recommend that the implementation of ordination of women will be  
34 determined by each division taking into consideration its impact on mission and unity  
35 within its territories.