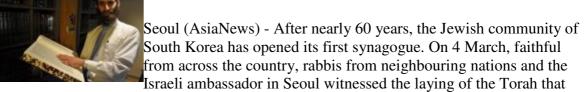## First Korean synagogue opens its doors

by Joseph Yun Li-sun, *AsiaNews*, 03/24/2012

http://www.asianews.it/news-en/First-Korean-synagogue-opens-its-doors-24328.html

After about 60 years, the Jewish community residing in the country has opened its first place of worship. Rabbi: "Never before have we found respect for our religion like here".

Seoul (AsiaNews) - After nearly 60 years, the Jewish community of South Korea has opened its first synagogue. On 4 March, faithful from across the country, rabbis from neighbouring nations and the Israeli ambassador in Seoul witnessed the laying of the Torah that marks the official opening of the place of worship. The community has praised the Korean people and society, "one of the most tolerant in all the world".

In South Korea, the Jews fled in the wake of the Korean War. In 1950, sent by the United States, about 200 soldiers of the Jewish religion settled in the country and remained there even after the end of hostilities, signed in 1953. Today there are about 500 Jewish residents, and half of them are Korean born: they are the sons and grandsons of those men who married local women.

The synagogue was opened in Seoul. In the past 6 decades, the community gathered in a "Chabad House": it takes its name from an Israeli organization, perhaps the biggest in the Middle Eastern country, which helps and supports the religious communities in the world. The "Chabad Houses" have not only the function of temporary synagogues, but they are the homes of rabbis.

Led by Rabbi Osher Litzman, the laying of the Torah launched festivities. According to the Jewish religion, in fact, a synagogue cannot open its doors if its holy book was not written by hand by a scribe in Israel: the Korean one arrived in early February, and the last part of the roll was left blank. The Korean Jews during the ceremony, wrote the last letters (in yiddish) that complete the Book.

According to the community, South Korea "is one of the best countries in the world with regard to tolerance and religious freedom." The country, says Rabbi Litzman, "is the opposite of anti-Semitism. We are blessed to be here: I have traveled all over the world but here I found respect and nothing else."