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**“AKU’S MONGOLIA’S APPROACH TO THE REUNIFICATIONS OF THE KOREAN
PEOPLE AND A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO THAT END”**

AKU's Mongolia's Approach to the Reunification of the Korean People and a Possible Contribution to that End

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First of all I would like to thank the Global Peace Foundation, One Korea Foundation and Action for Korea United for inviting me to participate in the work of this forum and speak on the issue “Mongolia’s approach to the reunification of the Korean people and its possible contribution to that end.”

I would like to take this opportunity to underline that I am looking forward to enriching my own knowledge of this very important issue not only for the Korean people but for the region and even beyond it. So thank you for providing such an opportunity.

Contacts. Our peoples had contacts since the recorded history. This historical fact attests that already at around 995 A.D., i.e. more than 1000 years ago, the Mongol Kidan Empire maintained cultural ties with the Korean empire of Gauri.

Commonalities. The two peoples have many things in common, including belonging to the northern Mongoloid race, similar blue spots when children are born, almost similar external appearance, belonging to the same Uralo-Altai language group as well as many similar customs.

Division of the Korean people. Mongolians regret the division of the Korean people at the end World War II that has brought about and is still causing immense national suffering, especially among the divided families. Hence such meetings are important not only to remind the plight of the divided Korean people but also to provide opportunity, despite the raising of tension on and around the Korean peninsula, to share views on how to promote the easing of the suffering and contribute to a practical search for the peaceful reunification of the Korean people. No one should doubt that the reunification process will be a long one, yet worth every effort.

Mongolia's relations with the two Koreas

a) traditional relations with the DPRK

With DPRK Mongolia maintains traditional friendly relations since 1948 when Mongolia became the second country to recognize and establish diplomatic relations. In 1951 both countries opened embassies in the other's capitals that allowed them to promote bilateral relations. Since both of them were under-developed, trade and economic relations were not so developed. However, political relations developed rapidly since both belonged to the then socialist camp. Nevertheless, even at that time the two countries differed on some issues, including on how best develop their respective socialist societies.

Thus Mongolia believed that its rapid socio-economic development was connected with closer cooperation with and division of labor within the socialist camp, especially with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the DPRK chose to follow the path of self-reliance known as *juche* (self-reliance). Even in foreign policies the

two countries differed, including on issue of peaceful co-existence of states with different political and social systems. Mongolia supported Soviet somewhat moderate approach, while the DPRK would have its own position explaining it with its geopolitical location. In the post-Soviet period, especially between 1999 and 2004, the DPRK closed its embassy in Mongolia, partially due to the latter's support of the Republic of Korea's 'sunshine' policy. Though Mongolia persisted in its support of the 'sunshine' policy, the DPRK re-opened its embassy.

Despite the above differences, the relations in the cultural area, exchange of students and celebrating different anniversaries have been and still are quite extensive

Both sides are interested in broadening bilateral relations. However due to weak investment possibilities on both sides, economic and trade relations are modest, at best. At times Mongolia provides humanitarian assistance to DPRK, mainly food.

b) mature relations with the Republic of Korea

Mongolia was the first Asian socialist country to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea in early 1990s. Since then both sides have rapidly broadened bilateral relations. Today the ROK the 4th largest trading partner (around 6 % of the total trade). During the time of Mongolia's transition from the socialist or command economy to a market one, South Korea first provided grant aid and then soft loans in many areas, for which Mongolians are grateful.

Looking back at our relations we could proudly say that our relations have expanded rapidly and matured in many areas of bilateral relations. In the political area, summit and high level exchanges have opened doors for broader cooperation. In the economic field, the major contribution that the ROK has made, in my view, was to accept Mongolian laborers to work in South Korea in different areas and get first-hand experience of working under market conditions. Today there are around 30.000 Mongolians that live and work in South Korea and 3.000 South Koreans – in Mongolia. South Korean has invested almost \$ 400 mln., mainly in small and medium services. Such industrial giants as Samsung, POSCO energy, Halla group are now starting to provide sub-contract services.

Direct links between government institutions, local and civil society organizations are expanding. Tourism is growing on both sides. In foreign policy, both are interested in contributing to the peaceful development on the Korean peninsula as well as in Northeast Asia in general. Politically, Mongolia considers the ROK as one of its third neighbors, while common democratic values and support for human rights bring the two countries even closer. All these led the two sides to develop relations of mature comprehensive partnership relationship that Mongolia is promoting with a few countries only.

Mongolia's view on the reunification of the Korean people

Mongolia's position of principle on the reunification of the Korean people has not changed. It believes that peaceful reunification is in the interests of the entire Korean nation, the region and well as beyond it. However, it cannot be accomplished mechanically or by the use of force. The decades of parallel existence and development have created conditions in both countries that cannot be ignored.

Though there is much talk about ultimate reunification on both sides, in general, in our view, the discussions are not backed up by zeal or conviction. Today it is unrealistic to talk about one parliament or one government, not even about a loose form of federation. Very few believe in the German type of reunification. Therefore there should first be a realistic understanding of the very concept of “reunification.”

Hence, without losing sight of the ultimate goal of national reconciliation or reunification, it seems most realistic at this stage is to focus on or accentuate the positive, and try to work on issues where there is an immediate common interest, like reunification of separated families, more mutual visits, more open communication, cooperation in different non-political fields, etc.

DPRK has sacrificed a lot to acquire nuclear weapons. Hence it is highly doubtful that they would abandon it easily. Therefore, to be realistic, one should not allow the nuclear issue, which has its own logic and dynamics, to hold hostage movement or progress in other areas, since these other areas can be conducive to creating more confidence and expand areas of common interests that could contribute to easing of tension and mistrust. Mongolia sees reunification as a distant goal; it sees reunification through the interests of the Korean people itself and of the region as a whole. In the end it is up to the Koreans on both sides of the 38th parallel to determine the pace and form of reunification, while other peoples provide every support for such a peaceful process.

Mongolia’s role in promoting the goal of the Korean reunification

Despite the on-going dangerous tensions, especially between the DPRK and the United States, the process towards reconciliation and gradual unification should be pursued. One should not under-estimate the role that such processes can play in strengthening the basis of peaceful reunification, however distant it may seem.

Hence discussion of the ideas and principles of such reunification needs to be pursued, as is being done at this forum. The process needs to be Korean-led and the main stakeholders can only be the Koreans themselves. Other states and stakeholders can and should provide support, mindful of their role and comparative advantages. As international relations demonstrate, the role of other states, including of small states, should not be discounted or underestimated. Such is the belief and approach of Mongolia bearing in mind its relations with the Korean people and the two Koreas today.

As part of the Northeast Asian region, Mongolia is interested in peace and stability, seeing its security and development directly connected with the developments in the region. As the saying goes, the duck is calm when the lake is calm. Hence its active policy towards the region. Thus in 2001 Mongolia, which does not have territorial and border problems with its neighbors and maintains good-neighborly relations with all the states of the region, including the two Koreas, has called for establishing a regional security mechanism. However, mutual suspicion and lack of trust prevent the states of the region to develop a regional security mechanism. Even the Six Party Talks, with a rather ambitious yet limited mandate, had to suspend its activities.

Thought not party to the Six Party Talks, Mongolia tries to play some positive role, Thus it has facilitated and organized meetings between the DPRK and Japan as well as between DPRK and the United States and expressed willingness to provide similar services if the parties agreed. However, Mongolia sees its role beyond facilitating bilateral meetings.

Ulaanbaatar Dialogue

Bearing in mind the lingering mutual suspicion from the cold war era and the lack of trust, Mongolia is committed to promoting trust through dialogue. Thus in 2013 it has proposed to hold a Track 1.5 (i.e. semi-official) dialogue meetings among the states of the region. The goal is not to resolve hard security issues, such as the DPRK's nuclear issue, but rather foster regional trust that could lead to resolving hard issues through addressing the so-called soft security issues of mutual concern and interest. These include economic development, energy and infrastructure cooperation, environmental challenges and other non-traditional threats which can lead to greater understanding and bridging differences.

This semi-official dialogue meeting (known as the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue (UBD)) is being held annually providing a venue and a political space for inclusive constructive dialogues. Though initially states were somewhat cautious of the UBD, soon it became clear that it provided an opportunity to discuss these soft security issues of great importance to the region. Thus in 2015 UBD specifically considered the issue of regional energy challenges, focusing on such issues as conventional and renewable energy resource reserves, their usage and cooperation possibilities as well as posture of energy infrastructure and better connectivity chances and challenges. In 2016 UBD considered such issues as promoting economic cooperation and developing infrastructure connectivity, cooperation on environmental protection and disaster management. In 2017 the focus was deepening energy and environmental cooperation among the interested parties.

Ulaanbaatar process

In 2005 the Northeast Asian regional network of GPPAC has launched the Ulaanbaatar process (UBP), a Track-II regional civil society dialogue process, which includes representatives of the two Koreas, to provide a space for civil society cooperation in addressing peace and security issues of common concern. The priority of activity of UBPP is promoting peace and security on the Korean peninsula, exchange information, making a habit of civil society dialogue and, if deemed practically useful, communicate its views to governments and to the public.

Thus its 2017 meeting called on all stakeholders in Northeast Asia to make sincere efforts to reduce mutual threats (of both nuclear and conventional warfare) and instead build mutual trust, and that no country should threaten another with nuclear weapons. UBPP also suggested that the U.S., the Republic of Korea and Japan, which have significant military capacity and resources, take the first step towards preemptive actions.

Mongolian NGO Blue Banner called for the de facto recognition of the DPRK as a nuclear-weapon state and deal with it as such. It has also called for direct U.S.-DPRK talks without preconditions so as to lower tensions and risk of miscalculations. In August UBPP has launched a joint publication of collection of essays entitled "Reflections on Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: perspectives from the Ulaanbaatar process" that captures the diverse opinions, concerns and thinking of civil society representatives of the region and decided to make available the joint publication in hard copy as well as online.

Bearing in mind Mongolia's relations with the two Koreas as well as its interest in developing traditional and mature relations with them, it can play a positive role in promoting trust and cooperation in the Northeast Asian region. Doing so could contribute to developing good-neighborly relations between the two Koreas which can form the basis for moving towards gradual reunification of the Korean people.