

Building a Northeast Asian Peace and Prosperity: Vision and Strategy

Tomiichi Murayama

Dear distinguished guests, It is an honor to be invited to the 3rd Jeju Peace Forum, and to speak today on the topic of building Northeast Asian peace and prosperity.

The year 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 60th anniversary of Japan's defeat. This also means, in China's case, the 60th anniversary of its victory, while for Korea this year marks 60 years since its independence from colonial rule. In human years, this marks the momentous occasion of one's 60th birthday. It is the year when one returns to the starting point and begins a new life. As we experience the respect of peace and put the past in order, I would like to reflect again on the meaning of new beginnings in the postwar period.

In the case of Japan, if we go back 60 years and add on another 40 years to make it 100 years ago, it was the year of the Russo-Japanese War. For Korea, since it was a protectorate of Japan, this time of 100 years ago could be known as an era of sorrow. The Russo-Japanese War was not limited to Japan and Russia, but brought war to Northeastern China and the Korean Peninsula, and it is impossible to forget that these places also became targets of plunder. Intoxicated by the

victory of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan further annexed Korea and turned it into a colony, and even went so far as to invade China and eventually extend the reach of war into parts of Southeast Asia, and drew Asians in a vast region into the calamities of war. As for Japanese citizens, who were unaware of the truth, a cruel fate awaited them.

Fifty years after the war on Aug. 15, 1995, I gave an address to the cabinet. By acknowledging historical realities and by reflecting back and offering an apology, we could form a common sense of history and sincerely set into action a postwar settlement and thus I felt that we could reach a reconciliation. As a statement based upon the decision of the cabinet, this represented the Japanese government's official view. This view is as follows.

"During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensure the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history. Building from our deep remorse on this occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Japan must eliminate self-righteous nationalism, promote international coordination as a responsible member of the international community and, thereby, advance the principles of peace and democracy."

It is a welcome sign that even after this statement was made, succeeding Japanese administrations inherited this as a basic line of policy. In the 1998 Republic of Korea-Japan joint statement by President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and in the 2002 DPRK-Japan Pyongyang declaration by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Chairman Kim Jong-il, the basic contents of the statement were included. However, words are shown through actions and it is important to strike a chord with the citizens of neighboring countries. The Japanese government should become more aware of this and

I believe must make more efforts to move toward realizing the course of the statement. In relation to this point, I hope that a careful judgment on the issue of Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine will allow for a courageous decision to be made.

After World War II, "Northeast Asia" became a spearhead, and the North-South division and the tragedy of the Korean disturbance still weigh heavily on the people of the ROK and North Korea. Today, the remnants of the world war structure still bring forth tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the structure of antagonism continues. However, with the June 2000 visit by President Kim Dae-jung to Pyongyang, the attainment of a South-North summit meeting became an epoch-making event, as it opened up the opportunity for reconciliation between the South and North and an easing of tensions in Northeast Asia. President Roh Moo-hyun inherited President Kim Dae-jung's policy and made a "peace and prosperity policy" as an objective of national affairs and the tenacious desire to stay in dialogue is highly praised.

In Japan's case, Prime Minister Koizumi visited North Korea in 2002. The fact that at this point the leaders of each country signed the DPRK-Japan declaration is momentous. However, although an agreement was made to realize the normalization of diplomatic relations between North Korea and Japan at an early stage, afterwards, progress was not smooth. There were difficulties with the kidnapping issue and most recently, the issue over DNA tests done on human remains has given rise to even more serious problems. The strained situation of not having established diplomatic relations must be settled. In order to create a firm peace and stability for the Northeast Asian region, sincere negotiations based on the Pyongyang declaration must be resumed so that the kidnapping issue can be addressed and historical issues can be cleared up in a comprehensive manner; diplomatic normalization must be realized.

North Korea's nuclear development is also influencing North Korea-Japan negotiations. This is still a grave problem that directly affects regional security and peace. Japan, as a victim of atomic bombings, cannot in any manner accept a new nuclear country emerging in the Northeast Asian region. We must realize the common goal of a

Northeast Asia as a denuclearized zone. North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear development plans and the promise of a security guarantee that is acceptable to the North lies at the center of the six-party talks. With North Korea's indication that it will indefinitely suspend its participation in the six-party talks, tensions have risen, but also, most recently, there has been some movement between North Korean and U.S. contacts, which is giving some hope. The six-party talks must be reconvened so that a compromise can be reached and so that this dangerous route will not be followed through any further.

If the six-party talks succeed, the six countries of Northeast Asia can reach an agreement on the North Korean nuclear problem and a regional security guarantee, and in this state, they can begin to set the foundations for regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Just as President Roh Moo-hyun expressed when he assumed office, heading toward the goal of a "Northeast Asia community" is our fundamental direction. This year, with the "ASEAN+3" framework as a basis, there seems to be movement toward building an "East Asian community." In order to realize the plans for an "East Asia community" together with the countries of Southeast Asia, a "Northeast Asian community" will take on an important role. In this respect, we anticipate mature efforts on the part of the Republic of Korea.

Japan and South Korea mark the 40th year of ROK-Japan diplomatic relations by declaring 2005 as the "Korea-Japan Friendship Year." In Japan, there is much enthusiasm over the "Korean wave," and I firmly believe that with a curiosity about Korea, the Japanese will visit the country and through culture, they will move in the direction of understanding the history and spirit of the Korean people.

On the other hand, I am troubled by the rise of distrust originating from the problems over history, and the increasing numbers of people who are falling for a short-sighted nationalism. This is related to the interests of the entire Northeast Asian region. I view highly the efforts the concerned nations have made for a regional community up until now. In order to open up the grand future of the Northeast Asian region, it is up to the next generation to take the reins and I anticipate the path that the next generation will take. In this light, exchange among young people and students is especially important.

The countries of Europe, which saw repeated wars, learned a deep lesson from the miserable experiences of World War II and in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past, the countries began building a community; it has already been half-a-century since Europe took those first steps. At the outset, it seemed like unrealistic talk, but today, the EU has become a reality. In our own region, mutual dependence is without doubt increasing. The development of transportation and communications is rapidly bringing people closer together.

Regarding the creation of a "Northeast Asian community" together with an "East Asian community," don't you think it is time for Korea, China and Japan to go beyond the past and join hands and move forward. Respecting each other's individual traits and looking toward a community that is both materially and spiritually rich, let us move forward, step-by-step.

I end my remarks with my sincerest thanks to all of the organizers, who gave their mind-and-body efforts to prepare this forum.