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Address

by

H.E. Mr. Lee Myung-bak

President of the Republic of Korea

at

the 64th Session of the General Assembly

of the United Nations

23 September 2009

New York

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Delegates,

First of all, let me extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. Ali Treki, on your assumption of the Presidency of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly. I am confident that under your able leadership, meaningful progress will be made during this session.

I also wish to express my appreciation and support to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts in reforming the UN.

The Republic of Korea and the United Nations

I would first like to recall the special historic ties between the Republic of Korea and the United Nations. The contemporary history of the Republic of Korea began with the UN.

Under the auspices of the UN, we held our first democratic elections in 1948. And, with the approval of the UN, we became the only legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, the Republic of Korea is a country that has been championed by the UN.

Men from 16 UN Member States came to our support when the Korean War broke out in 1950, only two years after the founding of the Republic. Fallen heroes of the Korean War from 11 countries are buried in the only UN cemetery in the world, located in Busan, the second largest city in Korea. To this day, the cemetery serves as a place for the Korean people to commemorate their noble sacrifices.

At the time of the Korean War, Korea was among the least developed countries in the world, with a per capita income of less than 50 dollars.

But to everyone's surprise, Korea was able to achieve both industrialization and democratization in only a single generation. Korea has transformed itself from an aid recipient country to a donor country.

While this achievement is the fruit of the Korean people's toils and tears, the invaluable support of the UN has been a great source of strength.

For this reason, Korea has been observing UN Day even before becoming a Member State in 1991.

Global Korea, Contributing to the World

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

Building on such achievements, Korea will embark on a path of actively contributing to the world and all of humanity. This is the very goal that Global Korea aims for.

We wish to share our past development experiences in order to help developing countries lift themselves out of famine and poverty. While financial support to developing countries is important, it is more important to find the right development model that fits each country can be a more fundamental way of overcoming poverty.

Today, the international community is working closely together to overcome an unprecedented financial crisis. As a member of the G20 Troika, Korea is making utmost efforts to strengthen the free trading system, which has been the powerhouse for global economic growth, while also ensuring that the voice of the developing countries is heard.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set forth by the UN should be realized. Development cooperation and humanitarian assistance need to increase, especially towards the developing countries most severely affected by the economic crisis.

Korea will fulfill its pledge to triple the volume of its 2008 official development assistance (ODA) by 2015. And in 2011, we will be hosting the Fourth High Level Forum (HLF-4) on Aid Effectiveness in Seoul. By ensuring its success, we will enhance aid effectiveness for the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, and contribute to strengthening the global partnership for a more comprehensive and effective development cooperation.

Today, young Korean volunteers under the name of “World Friends Korea” are doing volunteer work throughout the world to put into practice the spirit of love and giving. Currently, there are more than three thousand dispatched to some forty countries, and we will continue to send more volunteers, focusing on sharing our areas of strength in information-technology, medicine, and agricultural technologies as well as our experience in governance development.

Among other efforts, through its participation in peacekeeping operations, Korea is also actively engaging in promoting international peace and security and preventing terrorism. Currently, Koreans are serving in 13 missions around the world. Since last March, we have also been taking part in multi-national efforts to protect commercial vessels of all flags from acts of piracy in the waters off the coast of Somalia.

Korea will faithfully fulfill its responsibilities, as is expected by the international community, including in the areas of preventing conflicts, countering terrorism, and responding to natural disasters.

Promoting Green Growth

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

Responding to climate change has become an indispensable and urgent agenda for all of humanity. Climate change poses a common challenge to all humankind, and thus requires the concerted efforts of developed and developing countries as well as newly industrialized countries. For this reason, all countries need to take part and be prepared in addressing this challenge.

Korea highly appreciates the role of the UN in placing climate change as an urgent priority agenda and in galvanizing global efforts to address this critical issue.

At the Copenhagen Conference to be held in December of this year, the international community is expected to deliver a very important decision with great implications for the future. At this very place yesterday, we affirmed our commitment to making the Copenhagen Conference a success. Korea, while not included in Annex I of the UNFCCC, plans to make a voluntary announcement before the end of this year, its midterm target emissions cut by the year 2020.

Korea has proposed to establish a Registry of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) of developing countries at the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with a view to inviting developing countries to voluntarily participate in mitigation actions and providing the international support that they need. We hope that our proposals and efforts will contribute positively to successful outcomes at Copenhagen.

To proactively respond to climate change, Korea adopted “Low Carbon Green Growth” as a guiding vision for our nation and a strategy for further development. We are currently working to enact a Framework Law on Green Growth and establish a Five-Year Plan for Green Growth. Thereby, we will not only transform our economic and industrial structures, but also change our very lifestyles to become more future-oriented.

Under this Plan, Korea will annually invest about 2 percent of its GDP in the field of green growth during the next 5 years. This is twice the level recommended by the UN.

The underlying objective of the Low Carbon Green Growth strategy is to promote sustainable development, by putting in place a positive cycle in which the environment revives the economy and the economy preserves the environment.

This strategy is the most effective way to address global climate change and at the same time to overcome the economic crisis. By pursuing a green growth policy that makes assertive fiscal investments in the areas of green growth, Korea is preparing for the future, while also responding to the immediate economic crisis.

The development of green technologies and international cooperation are key factors to ensure success in responding to climate change. At the outreach meeting at the G8 Summit last August, Korea was designated as a leader in transformational technology, including the area of smart grid technology. Korea will strengthen global partnership for cooperation on green technology, and share with the rest of the world the ensuing benefits of this partnership.

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

While fossil energy is replaceable, water is not. Water is the most important resource in our lives. Accordingly, I wish to urge the President of the General Assembly, world leaders and the UN Secretary-General to take a special interest in the issues concerning water, since it is also a crucial factor in adopting to climate change and achieving the MDGs.

Today, close to half of the world's population suffers from water-related problems, and most of the climate change-related natural disasters, including floods, drought, and sea-level rises, are water-related disasters.

In the course of launching the East Asia Climate Partnership, the Korean Government reviewed water-related issues in Asia. We have come to the conclusion that the provision of fresh water and the development of policies and infrastructure for inundation and disaster prevention are the most pressing issues at hand.

Korea possesses cutting-edge desalination technology, and has been improving its integrated water resource management system. The restoration of *Cheong Gae Cheon*, which had been a concrete-covered dry stream for several decades in Seoul, has provided over 10 million residents with a pleasant space to rest by and a clean stream. This was an environment-friendly, greening project that helped the city to overcome the "heat island phenomenon," not to mention becoming more attractive at the same time.

Such experiences and achievements have led us to launch a ‘Four Major Rivers Restoration Project,’ involving the four rivers that traverse from north to south and from east to west in our country. This project not only provides a fundamental solution for securing water and controlling inundation, but also enables us to revive the ecosystem of these rivers.

The time has come for the international community to establish a governance system that will effectively address water-related issues. I am aware that some 20 UN agencies have been working in earnest on water issues. Issues concerning water are of a complex nature, as they have bearings on a wide range of areas.

To establish a more effective system of international cooperation on water, I would like to propose a specialized and integrated water management cooperation initiative.

Nuclear Non-proliferation and the Korean Peninsula

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

Global peace and security form the cornerstone for maintaining the stability and prosperity of all mankind. Today, global peace is being threatened by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery. To respond to these challenges, strong determination and cooperation among all countries are essential in strengthening the international non-proliferation regime, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Last October, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon put forward a “five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament.” And in his speech in Prague last April, US President Barack Obama set out his vision for “a world free of nuclear weapons.” Through sufficient discussions, we anticipate that these initiatives, which embody the hopes and desires of humanity, will enhance a common understanding on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

In particular, a nuclear weapons free Korean Peninsula must be realized in order to attain peace in Northeast Asia and beyond. Denuclearization is a prerequisite to paving a path toward genuine reconciliation and unification in the Korean Peninsula, which is the only remaining divided region in the world.

The Republic of Korea will take an active part in the concerted international efforts to dismantle the nuclear program of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). We urge the DPRK to join in these efforts, and to return to the Six-Party Talks right away and without any preconditions.

The Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula of 1992 to which both Koreas committed themselves must be observed. On such a basis, the Republic of Korea will increase dialogue and exchanges with the DPRK, and strengthen cooperation with the international community for the development of the DPRK.

I have proposed that through the Six-Party Talks, the DPRK dismantles the core component of its nuclear weapons program, and at the same time we provide the DPRK with security assurances and international assistance. This is what we call a “grand bargain.” We are discussing this proposal with the related countries.

I want to make it clear that now is the time for the DPRK to make the decision, to achieve genuine peace on the Korean Peninsula and for its own sake as well.

The Role of the UN

Mr. President and Mr. Secretary-General,

We are confronted with diverse and complex challenges that can only be overcome through international cooperation. In meeting the expectations of the international community, we hope that a renewed and strengthened United Nations will assume a greater role.

To this end, it is important for the UN to demonstrate efficient and effective management now more than ever. We hope that the UN reform initiatives in the various areas will yield concrete results.

As a responsible Member State of the UN, Korea will continue to render its close cooperation, so that the UN can play a leading role in bringing about progress to all of humanity and the international community at large.

Korea seeks to be a friend to the world, one that is considerate of others and contributes to the global society.

Thank you.

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