



GPPAC Northeast Asia Statement – Calling for a Peaceful Relationship between the Governments of the Republic of Korea and Japan

We, the participants of the GPPAC Northeast Asia Ulaanbaatar Process Meeting held in Mongolia from August 22-24, 2019, come from civil societies of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States. We gathered in Ulaanbaatar to discuss peacebuilding in the Northeast Asian region, and at this time reaffirmed our commitments to further our collaborations to bring peace in the region.

As active participants in peacebuilding efforts in Northeast Asia, we are deeply concerned about the recent deterioration in the bilateral relationship between the Governments of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan, started by the Japanese government’s adversarial economic measures against the ROK in July in response to the ROK Supreme Court ruling admitting the claims of victims of forced labor during the Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

The series of subsequent hostile economic policies of the Japanese government against the ROK, including the exclusion of the ROK from the “white list,” combined with the lack of sufficient diplomatic efforts to resolve tensions, are especially troubling. This cycle of events has not only aggravated the already tenuous relationship between the two governments, but also caused confusion within the societies of both countries. These developments seriously undermine Japan-ROK cooperation for peace and security of the region.

First and foremost, we call on the Japanese Government to fully recognize the wrong-doing during its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, and further admit that full redress is yet to be completed. As has been officially recognized by the Japanese government itself such as in the responses at the Diet in 1991 and 1992, the victims of forced labor and other colonial policies maintain the individual right to pursue claims to redress even under the ROK-Japan Claims Agreement concurrently concluded with the 1965 ROK-Japan Basic Relations Treaty. The recent ROK Supreme Court ruling should therefore be respected.

We are deeply concerned that the continued deterioration of relations between the two governments will lead to increased militarism in the region. The current Japanese government’s repeated attempts to revise Article 9 - the peace clause of the Japanese Constitution - are perceived within Northeast Asia as an ominous expression of Japanese militarism, and a rejection of dialogue as a means to resolve disputes. We strongly call on the Japanese government to not only preserve Article 9 but to act in accord with the letter and spirit of the law and ensure its implementation in the maintenance of a peaceful Northeast Asia.

We urge the political leaders of both Japan and the ROK to refrain from exploiting tensions between the two nations for domestic political ends. Particularly, we are concerned that such behaviour could foment hatred and contribute to the acceleration of nationalism.

Finally, we, as part of the global civil society network in solidarity to prevent armed conflict, call upon the two governments to pursue reciprocal and peaceful solutions towards building amicable relations for the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, and for a durable peace in the region. We, members of GPPAC Northeast Asia, believe in civil exchange and mutual understanding, based on the affirmation that only sincere dialogue and diplomacy will serve peacebuilding in the Northeast Asia. To this end, we will continue our efforts to strengthen civil capacity for peace.

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GPPAC Northeast Asia participants