

Let's open a new era without nuclear weapons through solidarity between
Korean and Japanese people
KIM Jinyoung (People's Solidarity for Social Progress, Republic of Korea)

Although the world faces the same crisis now more than ever before, it has been a difficult year to find a joint international response. Nevertheless, at last year's World Conference against the A and H Bombs, an important proposal was made to strengthen international solidarity against the arms race during the Covid-19 crisis, and to realize active steps towards peace such as the ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone in Northeast Asia through solidarity between Korean and Japanese people. Although the world hopes vaccines will bring a return to normal in 2021, what we want now is more than just a return to the world we've known. We must clearly state that "we don't want more warfare in the post-corona era." As the world marked a new era in which nuclear weapons were made "illegal" by the entry into force of the TPNW in January, let's call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons by raising our voices together.

There is also a change in the geopolitical situation surrounding Korea and Japan. In May 2020, the Trump administration formalized the relationship between the U.S. and China as 'strategic competition'. The 'engagement' policy, which defined China as a 'partner', has been dismissed. It is noteworthy that both the Republicans and Democrats have agreed on this point, and so has the Biden administration.

The U.S.-China relationship, which has entered a new phase, will have a significant impact on the future of Northeast Asia. This is a problem that criticizing U.S. militarism alone cannot solve. We must also be critical of the fact that the National Security Law in Hong Kong, territorial conflicts in the South China Sea and China's national strategies such as "Zhongguo Meng" (Chinese Dream), "Qiangjun Meng" (the dream of powerful military) and "One Belt One Road" policies clearly indicate its intention to strengthen military hegemony in Northeast Asia. Now that the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) has been scrapped, we must call

for discussions on nuclear disarmament that covers not only the United States and Russia but also China. Otherwise, South Korea and Japan will continue to be forced to participate in strengthening the U.S. military alliance against China. For example, the U.S. has already announced that it could deploy medium-range missiles aiming at China to South Korea or Japan.

On the Korean Peninsula, only the implicit agreement of the reduction and suspension of South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises and the suspension of North Korea's nuclear and long-range missile tests are preventing a military crisis. The problem is that this balance is on the verge of collapse. If North Korea resumes nuclear and long-range missile tests, or if South Korea and the U.S. resume joint military exercises, the fragile agreement reached at the North Korea-U.S. Summit in Singapore will collapse, and the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia could enter a crisis again. The U.S. Biden administration has insisted on the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises scheduled for this March, saying, "There is no place where military exercises are more important than the Korean Peninsula." However, military exercises, or to be more exact, "war exercises" have never led to peace. We must firmly oppose the attempt to resume large-scale South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises that only heighten military and political tensions.

North Korea's nuclear capabilities have increased since 2018 when inter-Korean and North Korea-U.S. talks began. According to a U.N. report, North Korea has continued its nuclear weapons program, including the production of highly enriched uranium and the construction of experimental light water reactors. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also says North Korea's nuclear activities are still a serious concern. North Korea recently showed off the world's largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) during a military parade. These strategic weapons targeting the U.S. mainland are the basis for the claim that since the U.S. will not provide nuclear umbrellas to South Korea and Japan even at the risk of North Korea's nuclear attack, South Korea and Japan should also arm themselves with nuclear weapons. In this atmosphere, the possibility of sharing nuclear weapons between the U.S. and South

Korea is being discussed.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un ordered the development of tactical nuclear weapons for the first time at the 8th Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in January this year. He is believed to have done this with South Korea and Japan in mind. In fact, considering their range it is clear that the recently released KN-23 new tactical missiles target South Korea and Japan, not the United States. Development of tactical nuclear weapon actually means mounting nuclear warheads on these missiles. Between 2019 and 2020 North Korea conducted 19 mid- and short-range missile tests that put South Korea and Japan in range. As such, the suspension of nuclear weapons development and testing by North Korea, which threatens the people of South Korea and Japan, is a very urgent demand.

Given these conditions, the peace movement must develop a response. Last year marked the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War. In commemorating these anniversaries Korean people, along with people around the world, gathered our aspirations for peace and the elimination of nuclear weapons. In particular, Korean civil society has launched its first signature campaign to urge the South Korean government and the world to join the TPNW. Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we held press conferences and online actions in solidarity with the Peace Wave.

South Korea has an important political schedule ahead, including the Seoul and Busan mayoral elections in this April and the presidential elections in March next year. However, there are no politicians who talk responsibly about how to create a society that invests in life and safety, not arms expansion, and how to create a peaceful Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia free of nuclear weapons. Under these circumstances, it would be a very important and effective campaign to denounce South Korea for having done nothing to eliminate nuclear weapons despite the successful entry into force of the TPNW, and urge the South Korean government to join the Treaty.

There are still some people who talk about "nuclear deterrence," but we all know that it was the voices of common people that revealed that "nuclear weapons are weapons of extinction that destroy human dignity," not tools of deterrence. Solidarity between Korean and Japanese people is now more important than anything else for the denuclearization of Northeast Asia and achievement of peace. The declaration of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Japan's peace constitution and three non-nuclear principles can serve as our guide framework. We need to demand the United States and China to stop their conflict and arms race for the sake of peace in Northeast Asia, and urge North Korea to take bold steps towards denuclearization. South Korea and Japan's joining the TPNW could serve as strong leverage for such measures. Thank you so much for listening.