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The Implications of the Republic of Korea's Hosting of the Third 'Summit for Democracy'

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From March 18 to 20, 2024, the third 'Summit for Democracy' was held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea under the theme of 'Democracy for Future Generations.' This paper will discuss what the Summit for Democracy is, the main agenda covered in this meeting, the blocization of global values, and how to use it as a forum for publicizing the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

The 'Summit for Democracy' is a forum for public discussion where various leaders from governments, international organizations, civil society, private sectors and academia gather to discuss "strengthening of democracy," "countering authoritarianism," "fighting corruption," and "promoting human rights."

The keywords that the third Summit for Democracy focused on were "youth," which is the champion for future democratic development, and "new technology," which is represented by the internet and AI. The future development of democracy was discussed rather than focusing only on the current problems democracy is faced. Since the role of young generation in areas such as technological innovation, anti-corruption, and gender equality is important for the future development of global democracy, there was emphasis on the need of efforts in utilizing technologies, education, and support to guarantee youth participation in democratic procedures such as policy-making,

judicial, and civil arena. President Yoon, Suk-Yeol repeatedly stressed that democratic backsliding is caused by cutting-edge technologies such as the internet and the AI generating fake news, which leads to social division and conflict, political agitation, and a decrease in public trust in elections. Through this meeting, the Republic of Korea showed its will to lead the high-tech sector in the future development of global democracy by utilizing world-class technology in IT and high-tech sectors represented by semiconductors, computers, the internet, and mobile phones.

From the first meeting in 2021, there has been a controversy over whether the Summit for Democracy will be reduced as a tool for global confrontation of values represented by the strategic competition between the U.S. and China. China and Russia, in particular, criticized South Korea for holding the Summit for Democracy during the meeting. The Summit for Democracy is intended to create a consensus on democratic backsliding in democratic countries and urge a joint response, while also discussing ways to counter the spread of authoritarian threats. However, South Korea must continue to focus on protecting the universal values of humanity, including freedom, peace, rule of law, and human rights, as well as recognizing the relationship between global issues and democracy, and addressing such issues through the development of democracy.

Despite the meeting being held in South Korea, it is regrettable that there was a lack of discussion on the human rights of North Korean residents and the unification of the Korean Peninsula. South Korea should actively use the Summit for Democracy, which seeks to strengthen democracy, counter authoritarianism, fight corruption, and promote human rights, as a forum for public discussion for North Korean human rights promotion and the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula based on the liberal democratic order in the future. Democracy, the promotion of human rights of North Korean residents, and the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula are inextricably linked. The completion of democracy in Korea is not just about guaranteeing the freedom and participation in democratic procedures of South Koreans and but also about ensuring the freedom and democratic rights to North Korean residents whose human rights are violated and suppressed through peaceful unification based on the liberal democratic order.

By forming and expanding international consensus on the status of North Korean human rights and ways to improve them through public discussions, the North Korean human rights improvement activities, which were limited to recommendations for perpetrators, should evolve into strengthening punishment and accountability in solidarity with international organizations, the government, civic groups, and academia that participated in the meeting. It is necessary to actively promote discussions that unification of the Korean Peninsula based on liberal democratic order can create a more favorable environment for unification. Additionally, more public speeches should be made by senior government officials such as the president, prime minister, and foreign minister, at venues and sessions on “unification of the Korean Peninsula” or “North Korean human rights” to achieve such peaceful unification. ©KINU 2024

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