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Evaluation of 2018 Inter-Korean Summit and Future Prospects

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The 2018 Inter-Korean Summit held between President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un came to an end with an adoption of the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula (hereinafter referred to as “the Panmunjom Declaration”). After a 100-minute extended meeting and a 30-minute dialogue on a bench, leaders of the two Koreas reached an agreement that contains 3 articles and 13 paragraphs. It can be evaluated that prior coordination through inter-Korean exchange of special envoys has been successful since the two Koreas have built a strong consensus on improving inter-Korean relations and promoting peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

The results of the Moon-Kim summit on April 27 can be summarized into following three characteristics. First, the Moon Jae-in government has clearly shown the world its willingness to actively build peace and co-prosperity on the Korean Peninsula through a groundbreaking advancement of inter-Korean relations. Detailed agreements stipulated in 3 articles and 13 paragraphs of the Panmunjom Declaration distinctly

indicate the will of both Koreas to improve overall inter-Korean relations, which includes: nine paragraphs on the advancement of inter-Korean relations and a release of military tension; and agendas that require actions of the two Koreas, such as non-aggression and the military confidence-building in establishing a permanent peace regime. The Declaration lays out in detail the implementation strategy of policy on North Korea that adopts a two-track approach of advancing inter-Korean relations and resolving North Korean nuclear issues at the same time. It also affirms that inter-Korean relations should play a leading role in the process of denuclearization negotiations.

Second, the Declaration made between two leaders clearly specifies a mutual goal to create a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula by reaffirming the need for complete denuclearization and expressing a will to declare an end to the Korean War and seek a peace treaty. For the first time, the Declaration that came out as a result of summit agreements explicitly mentioned denuclearization, although inter-Korean dialogues of the past have produced various sorts of agreements that included denuclearization or the resolution of nuclear issues. The 2007 October 4 Declaration only stipulated that there should be an effort to implement Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks and the February 13 Agreement for “the resolution of nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula.” Through 21 times of inter-Korean ministerial talks since the 2000 inter-Korean summit, the agreements have specified North Korean nuclear issues several times especially after the outbreak of its second nuclear crisis. However, those agreements used only tone-downed expressions such as “exchange of opinions on nuclear issues between the two sides” or “peaceful resolution of nuclear issues” (2002-2004). It was only after 2005 that the wording of the agreements had advanced to “a final goal is to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.”

Therefore, affirming a mutual goal of “realizing a vision of the nuclear-free Korean Peninsula through complete denuclearization” at the April inter-Korean summit can be analyzed to be an advanced level of agreement given that it identifies the level and scope of denuclearization for the first time. What is more meaningful

is that the agreement was made when North Korea has actually started implementing measures for a nuclear freeze such as suspension of nuclear missile tests and dismantlement of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site, as announced at the Plenary Session of the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee. However, those April agreements only lay out principles and the level of denuclearization and fail to mention a specific subject or schedule for implementation. A detailed evaluation, therefore, can only be made after the level of denuclearization is agreed upon at the North Korea-U.S. summit.

Third, in the Declaration, the two Koreas emphasized the irreversible nature of inter-Korean relations while stressing the need for a thorough implementation of agreements. Both Koreas also highlighted the speed of improving inter-Korean relations by presenting a timetable for the next summit and the implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration. The basic structure of the Panmunjom Declaration and the agreements made on inter-Korean cooperation projects suggest that contents of the Declaration were actually inherited from the 2007 October 4 Declaration. As if conscious of this, Kim Jong-un stressed the need for active implementation of the agreements, emphasizing 11 years of "lost time," in his remarks announced before the summit. In return, Moon Jae-in underscored the fact that the summit was being held in the first year of his presidency, with an emphasis on the speed of improving inter-Korean relations. Chairman Kim Jong-un reciprocated his remarks using the catchphrase 'malima speed battle.' The day after the summit, the Rodong Sinmun reported the results of the summit on a large scale, covering the Panmunjom Declaration that included an expression of denuclearization.

It is highly likely that the agreements made at the inter-Korean summit will be simultaneously implemented in each relevant area. Already, signs of implementation started to appear in many areas as stated in the Panmunjom Declaration. In the Declaration, South and North Korea agreed to completely cease all hostile acts against each other as of May 1 this year, including broadcasting propaganda via loudspeakers in the areas along the Military Demarcation Line. The two sides also agreed to first convene military talks at the rank of general in May

to alleviate military tension and build confidence. In addition, the Declaration hinted a possibility that a joint event can be held involving central and local governments, parliaments, political parties, and civil organizations in marking the 18-year anniversary of the June 15th North - South Joint Declaration. The Inter-Korean Red Cross Meeting and a meeting on sports events should be convened from June to July at the latest since South and North Korea agreed to proceed with reunion programs for the separated families on the occasion of the National Liberation Day on August 15 and to jointly participate in the 2018 Asian Games scheduled for August 18. The schedule for all relevant events appears to be set up seamlessly in the run-up to the next inter-Korean summit meeting — President Moon's visit to Pyongyang. Building on a series of such events, Moon can possibly visit Pyongyang in celebration of the 11-year anniversary of the 2007 October 4 Declaration.

Six paragraphs in the Declaration, involving inter-Korean relations that include inter-Korean joint projects on cooperation, exchange, visits, and contacts, seem relatively likely to be carried out smoothly within a timeframe of the next summit scheduled to be held in Pyongyang. However, three paragraphs on easing military tension contained in the Declaration failed to be implemented in the past due to conflicting opinions between the two Koreas in spite of the 2007 October 4 Declaration. Certain agreements declared at the level of both leaders — ceasing all hostile acts in every domain, including land, air, and sea — were a reaffirmation of inter-Korean defense ministerial agreements concluded right after the 2007 summit. In addition, a maritime peace zone in the West Sea and a joint fishery zone had not been implemented even though those issues were settled in agreements on the 2007 October 4 Declaration and defense ministerial meetings. It was because the two Koreas failed to reach an agreement on the scope of a maritime peace zone: South Korea wanted the Northern Limit Line (NLL) to be a reference point for allocating the same square mile between the two Koreas whereas North Korea did not approve it (inter-Korean military talks at the rank of general, July 2007). Contrary to the past, the Panmunjom Declaration includes a provision stating “South and North Korea agreed to devise a practical scheme to turn the areas around the Northern

Limit Line in the West Sea into a maritime peace zone...” Therefore, whether North Korea would recognize the NLL will become a major issue once military talks at the rank of general take place in May.

Therefore, the ROK government needs to speed up the process of implementing agreements that can primarily be pursued at the inter-Korean level. At the same time, it needs to actively coordinate the interests of concerned countries in building a peace treaty through the upcoming ROK-U.S. summit, and the ROK-China-Japan summit. By doing so, the government should take preparatory actions in leading up to striking a deal of denuclearization between Trump and Kim Jong-un in the North Korea-U.S. summit. It will put the Korean Peninsula on a shortcut to implementing the goal of the Panmunjom Declaration. ©KINU 2018

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