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Pyeongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018 and New Turning Point for Inter-Korean Sports Exchange

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The Pyeongyang Joint Declaration has produced significant agreements that could mark a new turning point in inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation. The decision to field the unified Korean team for the 2020 Olympics will serve as a stepping stone for maintaining a consistency of sports exchange. The South-North joint hosting of the 2032 Olympic Games will also provide an opportunity to change an image of the Korean Peninsula, marred by war and conflicts in the past, into a symbol of peace, speeding up the process of denuclearization and the establishment of a peace regime and further expanding the horizon of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. In addition, for more stable and sustainable formation of the unified Korean team, the two Koreas should promptly create an institutional mechanism, such as concluding an “inter-Korean agreement on sports exchange” or establishing a “joint office on inter-Korean sports exchange.” A joint hosting of the Olympics requires flexible cooperation of the South and the North in all related sectors, including politics, economy, society, and culture. Moreover, a “task force on hosting the Olympics” should primarily be launched within the government to review the process in advance for the Olympic co-hosting and make timely preparations and proposals.

Pyeongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018 and Inter-Korean Sports Exchange

The two leaders of South and North Korea agreed to actively promote cultural and social exchange and cooperation in the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang. The significance of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, came out as an outcome of the Summit, lies in that it reaffirms and fleshes out agreements stipulated in the Panmunjeom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula (hereinafter referred to as “Panmunjeom Declaration”) that the two sides agreed to invigorate multi-faceted cooperation, exchanges, visits and contacts of people from all levels of society in order to give further momentum to the atmosphere of national reconciliation and unity.

Three paragraphs of Article 4 of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration contain the agreements regarding societal and cultural exchanges. Paragraph 1, Article 4 stipulates “The two sides agreed to further promote cultural and artistic exchanges, and to first conduct a performance of the Pyeongyang Art Troupe in Seoul in October this year” as declared by Chairman Kim last spring. Paragraph 3 specifies “The two sides agreed to hold meaningful events to celebrate the 11th anniversary of the October 4 Declaration, to jointly commemorate the 100th anniversary of the March First Independence Movement Day, and to hold working-level consultations toward this end.” This is an indication of reinforced will for implementation of projects as a more detailed extension of the Panmunjeom Declaration: the two sides agreed to actively stage various joint events on the dates that hold special meaning for both South and North Korea.

While Paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration mostly reaffirm the agreements of the Panmunjeom Declaration, Paragraph 2 contains an agreement that could mark a new turning point for inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation. In fact, agreements in an area of sports exchange in the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration are described in more detail and put forth projects of mid- to long-term compared to other societal and cultural exchange as Paragraph 2 sets forth “The two sides agreed to actively participate together in the 2020 Summer

Olympic Games and other international games, and to cooperate in bidding for a joint hosting of the 2032 Summer Olympic Games.” In short, the significance of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration is evaluated as follows: through an agreement on fielding a single inter-Korean team with two years ahead of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, the Declaration lays the foundation for guaranteeing consistent occasion of sports exchange and discussing the systematic formation of such team. Moreover, the agreement on the South-North joint hosting of the 2032 Summer Olympic Games is expected to make a significant contribution to expansion and activation of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation given that the Olympic spirit of contributing to world peace through Olympic Games can be materialized through a joint hosting and that the joint hosting of Olympics requires cooperation not only in an area of sports but also of society and economy as a whole.

Tasks for Fielding Inter-Korean Single Team in Consistent Manner

The history of inter-Korean joint team's participation in international competitions, as agreed upon in the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration, dates back to the 1991 World Table Tennis Championships in Chiba and the 1991 FIFA World Youth Championship in Portugal. However, it was only after the formation of a joint women's ice hockey team at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics that activities of the joint Korean team have become visible. After the PyeongChang Winter Olympics on February 2018, the two Koreas participated as a unified Korean team at the 2018 World Team Table Tennis Championships in Halmstad in May and in a table tennis match at the 2018 Korea Open in July. Furthermore, a unified Korean team took part jointly as a team Korea in a match of women's basketball, canoeing, and rowing at the 2018 Asian Games (Jakarta - Palembang 2018), winning a gold medal in women's dragon boat races and a silver medal in women's basketball. Moreover, the two Koreas agreed to make a joint entrance and field joint teams in swimming and table tennis at the Indonesia Asian Para Games 2018 slated for October 6. In spite of consistent efforts for fielding

inter-Korean joint teams at various games, however, there still remain challenges such as: setting the date for the formation of a joint team, an issue of fairness in the selection process for athletes, and the difficulties of operating a joint team in the midst of international sanctions imposed on North Korea.

In fact, various issues and criticism have been raised regarding the formation of a joint team because those decisions have recently been made at a point nearing the actual competition—criticism that Korean athletes' tireless efforts for competing at international games, such as the Asian Game, were in vain owing to the selection process of athletes for the joint team and that there was an issue of fairness in such selection process. So far only the political aspect of inter-Korean joint team—the symbol of reconciliation and cooperation—has mostly been emphasized. However, the meaning of the unified Korean team should go beyond a single keyword of making a touching story, given the numerous recent formations of such team that took place within this year. Now time has come to shine a light on the aspect of team's performance at a game, an essential part of sports, and prove that when competed jointly as the unified Korean team, it can improve the team's performance.

In fact, international sanctions imposed on North Korea have actually been affecting sports exchange. Due to sanctions, South Korean athletes were not able to share even the most basic equipment with their North Korean teammates in a joint team. In one instance, a sponsor for South Korean team's uniform refused to manufacture uniforms for the joint team citing the sanctions so that the uniforms had to be made by a manufacturer in a third world country or other domestic company. Furthermore, a joint canoeing team, which participated in the Asian Games together as one team, attempted to take part in an international competition in the U.S. but their participation was declined because the international sanctions were hampering an issuance of visas for North Korean athletes.

In a bid to avert a controversy over the fairness issue raised in the selection process, the ROK government recently decided to have a consultation with the North on which games are required of forming the single inter-Korean team in the 2020 Summer Olympics and how the South and the North should participate in a qualifier

as the unified Korean team. Such approach can address the issue of fairness and tight-scheduling for formation of the past to some extent because two years are left for implementation prior to the participation in the Olympics. However, more fundamental resolution is required since the single inter-Korean team is going to be fielded not only during the 2020 Olympics but also on numerous occasions going forward.

Therefore, for more stable and sustainable formation of the unified Korean team, the two Koreas should promptly create an institutional mechanism, such as concluding an “inter-Korean agreement on sports exchange” or a “protocol for sports exchange.” Once such “agreement” or “protocol” on sports exchange is reached, it will regularize inter-Korean sports exchange and make the formation of a single inter-Korean team or the joint hosting at sports mega events more easily and efficiently, such as international championship, the Olympics, or the Asian Games. In addition, a “joint office on inter-Korean sports exchange” solely in charge of sports exchange between the two Koreas should be founded within the Inter-Korean Liaison Office. Within a joint office, the “performance measurement committee” and the “committee on formation of unified Korean team” should be installed to establish a principle and standard for the formation of single inter-Korean team, manage the performance of athletes and its improvement, and discuss the schedule and venue for joint training. Such institutional mechanism for sports exchange will contribute to more stable and efficient implementation of inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation in the future, including the fielding of the unified Korean team. At this critical juncture, diplomatic power is desperately needed to be granted sanctions relief or receive the exemption for an area of sports exchange. North Korean athletes should at least be allowed to share equipment and gears that were used by South Korean national team. Or the unified Korean team’s participation in international competitions, accredited by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or International Sports Federation, should be acknowledged as an area subject to an exemption for sanctions.

Joint Hosting of the Summer Olympics in 2032 and New Inter-Korean Relations

Another axis of agreements in an area of sports is hosting the 2032 Summer Olympics along with the formation of single inter-Korean team for 2020, which holds a significant meaning for forging new inter-Korean relations. First, a joint hosting of the Olympics will contribute to world peace by materializing the Olympic spirit. In fact, the Olympic Charter stipulates “The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world...through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values.” If the 2032 Summer Olympics can be successfully co-hosted by both Koreas, the embodiment of the Olympic spirit will provide an opportunity to put an end to decades-old hostility and prolonged conflicts since the division caused by the Korean War and to usher in an era of genuine peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

Second, the joint hosting can speed up the process of denuclearization and the establishment of a peace regime on the peninsula. In fact, the hosting of the Olympics requires a peaceful security environment as a prerequisite. The international community including the U.N. emphasizes the significance of peace by adopting the Olympic Truce resolution and urging all its member states to abide by it. To that end, the South-North joint hosting of the Olympics is not likely without a peaceful security environment, including denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. A venue for the Olympics is usually decided seven years prior to the actual event but more recently 11 years beforehand. As a venue for the 2032 Summer Olympics is expected to be determined between 2021 and 2025, denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula should be completed by 2021 at the earliest or 2025 at the latest. The 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang has brought an issue of North Korea’s stalled denuclearization on the negotiating table. Furthermore, the 2nd North Korea-U.S. summit is becoming an increasing possibility. Against this backdrop, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the U.S. aims to complete denuclearization of North Korea by January 2021. President Moon also said that denuclearization will be possible within 2021 if the U.S. promptly takes corresponding

steps. At a time when 2021 is being cited as a deadline for the complete denuclearization, a timetable for the Olympics will contribute to speeding up the denuclearization process and the transition of existing armistice regime into a peace regime through a declaration to end the Korean War and conclusion of a peace treaty.

Third, the joint hosting will offer an opportunity to shape new inter-Korean relations by expanding the horizon of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. In the process of bidding for and co-hosting the Olympics, the South and the North need to significantly expand exchange and cooperation not only in sports sector but also in areas of the economy and tourism. For the hosting of the Olympics, it should be proven to the international community that there is a secure social infrastructure established, including transportation and communications and that athletes and tourists alike will be able to safely and freely roam around areas surrounding the Olympic venue. However, North Korea, even in its capital city of Pyongyang, currently lacks social infrastructure including transportation and communications and has yet to open its door to the outside world due to the rigid nature of the regime. South and North Korea, in the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyongyang, agreed to hold a ground-breaking ceremony within this year for the east-coast and west-coast rail and road connections and conduct a related field investigation around this October. Starting with those first steps, if cooperative projects are carried out in a stable footing, including the establishment and maintenance of networks of traffic and communications between Seoul and Pyongyang, both of which are leading candidates for co-hosting the Olympics, it will open a new horizon in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. In addition, if the two sides create a peace tourism belt connecting an east coast joint special tourism zone as agreed upon in the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, linking Seoul with Pyongyang, Mt. Paektu, and Hallasan Mountain, North Korea could build itself a new national image going beyond an existing reclusive image and the two sides can pioneer a new area for cooperation in tourism.

As such, the joint hosting of the Olympics is expected to contribute not only to peace on the Korean Peninsula but also to prosperity attributed to an expansion

of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. However, there still remains a challenge of the synchronous and flexible progression between denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and North Korea's development and opening-up. To that end, the ROK government needs to internally prepare a master plan for the joint hosting of the Olympics with a goal of complete denuclearization set for 2021. Ultimately, the master plan should be finished up by establishing a "joint committee on bid and joint hosting for the Olympics" that involves both the South and the North. However, prior to that, a "task force on hosting the Olympics" should primarily be launched within the government to review the process in advance for the Olympic co-hosting and make timely preparations and proposals.

Considerations for the Future

The Pyeongyang Joint Declaration has produced significant agreements that could mark a new turning point in inter-Korean sports exchange and cooperation. The decision to field the unified Korean team for the 2020 Olympics will serve as a stepping stone for maintaining a consistency of sports exchange. The joint hosting of the 2032 Olympic Games will also provide an opportunity to change an image of the Korean Peninsula, marred by war and conflicts in the past, into a symbol of peace, speeding up the process of denuclearization and the establishment of a peace regime and further expanding the horizon of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. However, the joint hosting of the Olympics cannot be done by a simple planning but requires flexible cooperation of the South and the North in all related sectors, including politics, economy, society, and culture. Detailed preparations and bold decisions are necessary to advance inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, which has played a role of thawing frozen inter-Korean relations since last winter, so that through the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration, sports exchange can serve a crucial role that can bring about peace on the Korean Peninsula and significantly enhance inter-Korean relations. ©KINU 2018



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