

## Online Series

2024. 03. 06 | CO 24-21

# Evaluation of the 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement

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### Main Contents of the Speech on March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement

On March 1, 2024, President Yoon Suk-yeol delivered a commemorative speech to mark the 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. The main messages of this speech can be summarized into the following four points: First, the March 1<sup>st</sup> Proclamation of Korean Independence is based on liberalism. In the commemorative speech, the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement is emphasized as a forward-looking independence movement based on liberalism that is unprecedented in history. It was emphasized that South Korea was able to make a leap forward as a global pivotal nation by overcoming war and division, thanks to liberalism that originated from the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. Second, the fact that the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement is “made complete by unification that brings freedom to everyone” was highlighted. This means that all citizens should strive together towards a free and unified Korean Peninsula where everyone becomes the rightful owners of the country. Third, fair evaluation and proper succession of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence was emphasized. It was stressed that not only armed independence movements but also efforts in various fields such as diplomacy, education, culture, and industry should receive fair and due recognition.

Fourth, it was emphasized that South Korea and Japan are working together to overcome the painful past and moving toward a “new world.” Japan was defined as South Korea’s partner that shares the values of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, pursues important common interests in areas such as North Korea, industry, finance, and advanced technology, and cooperates for the peace and prosperity of the world.

### **The Meaning the Speech on March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement Holds**

Firstly, it expanded the values and lessons of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. This year’s commemorative speech made it clear that independence and the remarkable achievements the Republic of Korea made since then were possible because of liberalism and the strong aspirations and efforts of our ancestors 105 years ago. It was also emphasized that unification of Korea completes the independence movement. In this regard, the spirit of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement is free will, and independence movement is synonymous with unification movement. Another noteworthy point in this commemorative speech is that North Koreans and defectors should also be recognized as valuable partners and protagonists in shaping freedom, peace, and unification on the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, the Korean government clearly expressed its strong and resolute determination to respond firmly to North Korea’s anti-national, anti-unification, anti-peace, and anti-humanitarian behaviors. Recently, North Korea has defined South Korea not as a country that shares kinship but as an American colony, and defined inter-Korean relations as between two belligerent states.

This is a tactic aimed at perpetuating national division. Additionally, North Korea’s threat to conquer South Korea through nuclear warfare represents a hostile and inhumane stance directed towards the 70 million Korean people and 2.3 million foreign residents. Therefore, it is only natural and appropriate that the Korean government asserted its determination to confront North Korea’s tactics of national division with national unity, nuclear threats with peace, perpetuation of division with unification, and inhumane intentions with universal values through strong international solidarity.

## Direction of Follow-Up Measures of the Commemorative Speech

The current Kim Jong-un regime is faced with various serious challenges both domestically and internationally, making it resort to desperate measures. Paradoxically, this presents an opportunity to drive genuine change in North Korea in an active manner. To this end, it is essential to first expand cooperation among the Republic of Korea, the United States, and Japan into international solidarity that pursues shared values of freedom and democracy. We must build a solid framework of sanctions against North Korea and robust deterrent capabilities. Furthermore, the inflow of information into North Korea should be accelerated to communicate South Korean people's aspirations for freedom, peace, and unification to the North Korean residents. Alongside efforts to strengthen the ROK-US alliance, we should enhance our independent deterrent capabilities further, rendering North Korea's efforts to advance nuclear programs futile, thus ensuring that South Korea continues to lead peace on the Korean Peninsula. To support such policy directions, the following three measures may be prioritized.

First, a new unification vision should be devised for the second March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. This new vision must succeed the spirit of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence movement, which advocated shared ethnicity, freedom, and peace, and contribute to the South Korea-led unification. This is the right time to declare such determination to the Koreans in the North as well as in the South, and the entire world. Second, the reality in North Korea should be further revealed. It is imperative to elicit global condemnation for the atrocious human rights violations suffered by North Korean residents and the regime's anti-historical tyranny. By translating the key findings of the "Report on the Perception of the Realities of North Korea's Economy and Society" recently released by the Ministry of Unification into major languages and disseminating them, or producing and releasing documentaries on the reality of North Korea, we need to raise global awareness and understanding of the appalling reality of North Korea. Third, the South Korean government must establish

a tradition of reaffirming the unwavering determination of the South Korean people towards unification on March 1 and August 15 every year. Unfortunately, there is currently no national holiday dedicated to reflect on the aspirations of the Korean people for unification. In addition to the designation of July 14 as North Korean Defectors' Day and commemorating 'first-arrived unification,' a tradition of wishing for 'soon-to-come unification' needs to be established. ©KINU 2024

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