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Pyeongchang Olympics Has to Be ‘Peace Olympics’

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President Moon Jae-in in his keynote address at the United Nations General Assembly in New York emphasized that the Pyeongchang Olympics has to be a ‘Peace Olympics.’ For this, the government is continuously proposing North Korea participate in the Pyeongchang Olympics and calls on the active cooperation of the international community, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It will be worth considering what kinds of efforts are needed to elevate the Pyeongchang Olympics into a Peace Olympics.

Olympics and Peace

The Olympics are aimed at contributing to the construction of a peaceful world under the banner of “Great Celebration for Peace and Harmony of Humanity.” However, there have been many cases that such Olympic spirit was not protected due to political antagonism and conflicts. For instance, during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, the Palestinian terrorist group, Black September, intruded on the Olympic Village and killed 11 Israeli athletes. Furthermore, countries in the West, led by the

US, boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Also, communist states led by the Soviet Union boycotted the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. However, the Olympics are not always politically exploited as illustrated by the above cases. The international community strives to contribute to world peace, an ultimate goal of the Olympics, by temporarily suspending a war in war zones at least during an olympics period through Olympic Truce. In 1993, with the signature of 184 Member States, the IOC submitted a proposal regarding the Olympic Truce during the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympics to the UN General Assembly. The UN General Assembly acknowledged that the Olympic Truce proposed by the IOC was in line with the UN Charter's principles and objectives and adopted the resolution for the observance of Olympic Truce for the first time that year. And ever since, the resolution for Olympic Truce has been adopted during each summer and winter Olympics.

Although Olympic spirit emphasizes world peace as mentioned above, it is not easy to achieve real peace through the Olympics or to overcome antagonism among states. The international community, however, agrees with the principle that the Olympics should not be politically exploited and that the event itself should contribute to world peace. The Pyeongchang Olympic Games, scheduled to be held in South Korea where increased military tensions exist and technically at war only temporarily suspended by the armistice, will provide a good opportunity to realize the peace spirit spearheaded by the Olympics.

Efforts for the Peace Olympics

North Korea's participation in the Olympics is a prerequisite for the success of the Pyeongchang Olympic Games as a Peace Olympics, but it is so far unclear whether Pyongyang will be participating. Jang Woong, who is a North Korean IOC committee member, expressed an ambiguous stance on North Korea's participation. On September 16, during an interview with the IOC Channel, he said, "I am convinced that politics and the Olympics are separate issues and I do not think there will be

any big incidents occurring in the Pyeongchang Olympics.” However, he also stated that the North Korean Olympic Committee (NOC) cannot confirm their participation. His remark implies that North Korea’s participation in the Pyeongchang Olympics is the decision of the top leadership and that their participation is not decided yet.

If so, what will the government have to do to ensure that the Pyeongchang Olympic Games succeed as a Peace Olympics and contribute to a peace settlement on the Korean Peninsula in the future?

First, the South Korean government should specify conditions for North Korea to participate in the Pyeongchang Olympics. In order for North Korea to participate in the Olympics, securing the rights to participate in a match is essential. To expand the number of North Korean athletes’ participation, it is possible to consider wild card entries and extra matches for each sports sector. For that, cooperation between the IOC and the International Federation is essential, so the government should actively engage in sports diplomacy.

Apart from North Korean athletes’ participation, the South Korean government may also consider having a North Korean cultural performance show-cased in the Opening Ceremony. Of course, it is well known that North Korean cultural performances are dominated by political messages, but it will contribute to highlighting the symbol of a Peace Olympics if the North tones down the degree of political messaging embedded in their performance through coordination and agreed upon terms between South and North Korea.

Second, the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games will be held not only in February. It should also be noted that the Pyeongchang Paralympics will be held in March immediately after the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. In November 2016, North Korea ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is paying more attention to the international exchanges of people with special needs. North Korea submitted the Pyeongchang Paralympics entrance form to the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) on October 1. Even if the North does decide not to participate in the Pyeongchang Olympics, the government still needs to fully utilize the Paralympics to continue having a dialogue with North Korea,

and the personnel of Paralympic sports in South Korea should try to contact the North through IPC officials.

Third, the Pyeongchang Olympic Games as a Peace Olympics are a starting point for improving inter-Korean relations through sports. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare a concrete master plan for exchanges of inter-Korean sports after the Olympics. Even if North Korea participates in the Pyeongchang Olympics or Paralympic Games, such achievement will merely be a temporary event unless measures are taken to expand exchanges in the sports sector.

Finally, even if the Pyeongchang Olympic Games are successfully hosted with North Korean participation, the South Korean government should also prepare for the possibility that the Pyeongchang Olympics may not result in a dramatic improvement of inter-Korean relations. If North Korea decides to participate in the Olympics, it might be a 'two-track' strategy to escape isolation from the international community due to its nuclear and missile development. Therefore, the South Korean government has to prepare a responsive measure under the assumption that North Korea will take a dual approach of developing nuclear weapons and also participating in the Olympics at the same time.

While the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games were evaluated as having contributed to the reconciliation of the two camps of the East and West and eventually destroying the Cold War system, the event still did not contribute to improving inter-Korean relations. The 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, which will be taking place 30 years after the Seoul Olympics, is another important opportunity to once again promote the improvement of inter-Korean relations, which could not be achieved in 1988. As tensions on the Korean peninsula are at its peak due to North Korea's nuclear provocations and the deadlocked dialogue channels between the South and North, the South Korean government must fully utilize the Pyeongchang Olympic Games so that it can symbolize a 'blue bird'—a channel through which peace can be achieved.

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