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What is the Meaning of Realizing the Peace Olympics?

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President Moon Jae-in's initiative to make the PyeongChang Olympics the Peace Olympics has come true. This paper sets out to analyze the meaning of realization of the Peace Olympics and South Korea's proactive role in the process in light of inter-Korean relations and North Korean nuclear issue.

Realization of Peace Olympics through Leading Role of South Korea

South Korea's leading role was important in the process of turning the situation around of the Korean Peninsula, which had been at the brink of war until the end of 2017, as well as realizing the Peace Olympics. First, it should be remembered that South Korea has consistently urged North Korea to participate in the Peace Olympics as a conflict between North Korea and the international community has worsened over the North's nuclear issue. Last June, President Moon Jae-in formally requested North Korea to participate in the PyeongChang Olympic Games, form a single team, make an entry of joint Korean team at the opening ceremony, and send a cheering squad to the Olympics. Last year, President

Moon continuously stressed through Berlin Declaration on July and the Liberation Day Celebration speech in August and at the UN General Assembly in September that North Korea's participation in the PyeongChang Olympics will be an important opportunity for the South and the North to move toward a path of peace. His coherent position has become an important driving force in the formation of environment for the Peace Olympics. Second, in December 19, Moon officially announced his position to postpone the ROK-US joint military exercise during the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. This was a very proactive measure of the Republic of Korea (ROK) to alleviate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Given North Korea's sensitive response to the ROK-US joint military drill, South Korea's decision was deemed very important to stop North Korea's provocative behaviors and induce its participation in the Olympics.

North Korea reacted positively to South Korea's overture and policy position in its New Year's Day speech. The ROK immediately responded to Kim Jong-un's message by suggesting high-level talks and presenting prepared plans (joint entry of South and North Korean athletes at the opening ceremony, joint cheering performance, dispatch of artists, etc. in the Winter Olympics). Eventually, the Peace Olympics has come true owing to Pyongyang's acceptance of Seoul's suggestions. Had it not been for South Korea's active role in the process, the environment for the Peace Olympics would not have been created, although the forming of the right environment can be related to North Korea's decreased need for nuclear and missile tests after its completion of nuclear force, its increased need for relieving tensions, and its intention to improve an external image on the international stage.

Creating Opportunity of Improvement of Inter-Korean Relations

The realization of the Peace Olympics in February 2018 is even more dramatic when considering the deadlock or cut-off of inter-Korean relations up until 2017. North Korea, which had remained silent to South Korea's proposal of dialogue

and exchange up until last December, finally responded to an offer of participation in the Olympics, leading to the rapid development of inter-Korean dialogue and exchange. North Korea's participation in the Olympics itself has promoted inter-Korean exchange. In early January, the inter-Korean communication channel was restored in the process of high-level talks, and a delegation of roughly 500 North Koreans, including athletes, performers, and cheerleaders, visited the South. In high-level talks, the two Koreas have pledged to promote contacts, exchange, and cooperation in various fields beyond the Olympics and agreed to hold military talks to resolve military tensions. Such agreements opened a way for the continuation and expansion of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation after the PyeongChang Olympics/Paralympics. This implies that the followings could take place as a regular event: humanitarian exchange and cooperation, including the reunion of separated families; a variety of socio-cultural exchanges, such as academic, religious, and sports events; and military talks. In particular, an agreement to hold military talks is important because it suggests a possibility of establishing a management system for preventing accidental conflicts and alleviating tensions. The Peace Olympics can become a springboard for restoring inter-Korean relations and trust.

Stepping Stone for the Progress of North Korean Nuclear Issue

The holding of the Peace Olympics carries significance because it has created conditions for peaceful resolution of North Korean nuclear issue. The essential condition of hosting the Peace Olympics was to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The relaxation of tensions required a temporary suspension of North Korea's nuclear and missile tests and the ROK-US joint military exercise. These two pre-requisites are precisely related to conditions for US-North Korea dialogue and negotiation on nuclear issue, as emphasized by both Trump and Kim Jong-un. Pyongyang is expected to stop testing missile launches for the longest period of time since the inauguration of the Trump administration. The realization of the Peace Olympics can be seen as having contributed to creating conditions for dialogue and

negotiation that both the US and North Korea have mutually demanded.

Improved inter-Korean relations thanks to the PyeongChang Olympics can also contribute to resolving North Korean nuclear issue. Improvement of inter-Korean relations creates an environment favorable for dialogue and negotiation because it accompanies alleviating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The improved relationship also has an important meaning since it enhances Korea's role as a facilitator of US-North Korea dialogue. Even if the above-mentioned conditions for dialogue are established, the differing position on the negotiating agenda - the US preference for denuclearization agenda and North Korea's opposition toward it - is an obstacle to resuming a negotiation, which requires intervention and coordination. However, it is difficult for South Korea to figure out the true intention of North Korea when inter-Korean relations are blocked without any trust. Consequently, it will leave less room for persuading one another and narrowing the gap of opinions when initiating negotiation and moving forward. That is why an improvement of inter-Korean relations is important. One reason that South Korea was able to promote the agreement on denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula on September 19, 2005, though it was scrapped later on, was attributed to the continuous inter-Korean dialogue and exchange. Restoring inter-Korean relations and rebuilding confidence in conjunction with the PyeongChang Olympics can become a driving force for having dialogue and negotiation and improving relations between the US and North Korea.

As described above, the realization of Peace Olympics in PyeongChang in February 2018 has affirmed Korea's leading role in resolving Korean Peninsula issue and created an opportunity for the improvement of inter-Korean relations and the resolution of North Korean nuclear issue. ©KINU 2018

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