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“Spring of the Korean Peninsula” and Suggestions for Inter-Korean Social and Cultural Exchanges

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Inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges have served as a warm breeze driving the “spring of the Korean Peninsula.” The two leaders at the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit stressed the importance of social and cultural exchanges and agreed upon detailed measures for expansion of exchanges. To that end, inter-Korean exchanges are expected to further increase across all social and cultural sectors. There are remaining tasks to promote inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges and maintain their continuity as follows: 1) institutional agreements between the two Koreas are required to secure the continuity of social and cultural exchanges; 2) it is necessary to set up a control tower dedicated to efficiently leading social and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas; 3) the local governments should actively take part in social and cultural exchanges; and 4) it is necessary to strategically carry out a project by crafting a detailed road map.

Over the last few months, inter-Korean relations have changed very dramatically. Though only a while ago South Koreans felt uneasy about a possibility of war looming large on the Korean Peninsula, they are now talking about the “spring of the Korean Peninsula,” looking forward to peace and prosperity in the future. The spring of the Korean Peninsula

started with inter-Korean sports, culture, and art exchanges that had continued even under the strained inter-Korean relations and reached a milestone through the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit held at Panmunjom on April 27. Through this process, all Koreans witnessed first-hand impacts and ripple effects of the sports, culture, and arts sectors on the improvement of inter-Korean relations.

The sports sector has thawed the frozen inter-Korean relations, and South and North Korean musical troupes' mutual visits and performances acted as a driving force to ease tensions between the two Koreas that could have arisen during the summit preparations and to maintain an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation.

The Panmunjom Declaration and Social and Cultural Exchanges

In consideration of the importance of sports, culture, and arts, concrete measures for expanding social and cultural exchanges in the future were agreed upon in the Panmunjom Declaration between leaders of the two Koreas. Specifically, in Article 1, Paragraph 4 of the Panmunjom Declaration, the two leaders used the phrase “to rejuvenate the sense of national reconciliation and unity.” The use of such expression indicates the willingness to utilize social and cultural exchanges in overcoming the heterogeneity of North and South Koreans caused by age-old division and confrontation and restoring the national homogeneity, thereby laying a cornerstone for development of inter-Korean relations. In addition, the two sides agreed to promote cooperation and exchange for South and North Koreans from all walks of life, thereby allowing the social and cultural exchanges to serve as an event of harmony for the entire nation, not just for a specific group. Given that the inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges can be resumed without hampering the international sanctions against North Korea that still remain effective, the agreement on the expansion of social and cultural exchanges can greatly contribute to the realization of inter-Korean exchange and the development of inter-Korean relations.

Expansion of Exchange, Cooperation, Visit, and Contact

As stipulated in the Panmunjom Declaration, events that both South and North Korea commemorate together are expected to be held on June 15 this year in celebration of North-South Joint Declaration, August 15, the National Liberation Day, and October 4, the 2007 Inter-Korean Summit. On June 15, it will be difficult to hold a large-scale event since South Korea's local elections are scheduled on June 13. From the perspective of inter-Korean relations following the inter-Korean summit, however, it is desirable to take advantage of this symbolic date, June 15. Considering recent changes in the situation, a joint ceremony between the two Koreas for National Liberation Day on August 15 is expected to attract more attention. If the North Korea-U.S. Summit slated somewhere between late May and early June yields a positive result, the August 15 joint ceremony will be expanded further recalling that South and North Korea were once one nation and not divided at the time of liberation.

Inter-Korean sports exchanges are projected to develop at a rapid pace. The inclusion of Choi Hwi, Chairman of North Korea's National Sports Guidance Committee in the official entourage for this April inter-Korean summit illustrates how much interest Kim Jong-un has in the sports sector. It is well-known that North Korea has focused on raising the national sports capacity under the banner of "building a sports powerhouse" since Kim seized power and that he is mainly interested in basketball.

It also seems possible to resume an excavation research project of the Manwoldae Palace in Kaesong and a joint project to compile Gyeoremal-Keunsajeon (unabridged dictionary compilation project) that were jointly conducted by the two Koreas and halted so that the two Koreas can restore the inter-Korean homogeneity of history and language along with exchange of sports, culture, and arts.

Measures for Promoting Inter-Korean Social and Cultural Exchanges

Social and cultural exchanges between South and North Korea are expected to expand in the future. However, given that such exchanges of the past failed to continue and ended up as one-time event, following measures should be considered to facilitate exchange and maintain the continuity at the same time.

First, institutional agreements between the two Koreas are required to secure the continuity of social and cultural exchanges. Therefore, there is a need to establish a committee for inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges, which was agreed at the inter-Korean prime ministerial meeting held in November 2007. In addition, social and cultural exchanges should continue regardless of political situations by concluding the inter-Korean social and cultural agreement or the social-cultural exchange and cooperation agreement.

Second, it is necessary to set up a control tower dedicated to efficiently leading social and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas. It is required to establish a control tower for implementing policies, in which representatives from the government agencies, the local governments, and private organizations of each field can participate to act as a coordinator for such exchanges.

Third, the local governments should actively take part in social and cultural exchanges. Exchange projects led by the local governments should be effectively promoted in that they are relatively free from the rigidity and political sensitivity seen in the central government-led projects, thereby being able to secure diversity in those projects.

Fourth, it is necessary to strategically carry out a project for the phased and gradual expansion of exchange. The social-cultural exchange and cooperation committee should draw a road map for exchange projects and identify and conduct: 1) short-term projects that can promote exchange with North Korea; and 2) mid- to long-term projects that ensure the continuity of such exchange.

In South Korean artists' cultural visit to North Korea, Kim Jong-un suggested having a concert next fall in Seoul on the theme of "Fall Has Come." Fall is a harvest



season where the efforts of spring and summer bear fruits. It is hoped that South and North Korea could implement agreements reached at this inter-Korean summit in a responsible manner, allowing the “Fall Has Come” concert to be held in celebration of harvest of inter-Korean relations. And hopefully in the process, social and cultural exchanges could act as a facilitator for the development of inter-Korean relations. ©KINU 2018

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