

The Gist of Statements at the Joint Press Conference:

Sec. Rice and Min. Ban Shared the Commitment to A Peaceful Solution

The following are excerpts from the opening remarks by South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ban Ki-moon, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and answers of the U.S. Secretary of State at a joint press conference on March 20 in Seoul. - Ed.

Minister Ban Ki-moon: Secretary Rice and I had a very useful and in-depth consultation on the ROK-U.S. alliance and the North Korean nuclear issue. We both expressed satisfaction on the fact that the ROK-US alliance, based on a firm foundation, has been suddenly developing into a comprehensive and dynamic partnership. In particular, Secretary Rice expressed a deep gratitude to the dispatch of our soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan as a symbol of rock solid ROK-U.S. alliance.

On the North Korean nuclear issue, Secretary Rice and I have reviewed the latest developments as well as the diplomatic efforts made by our two countries since we last met in Washington DC on February 14. At today's meeting, we re-affirmed our commitment to realize the peaceful and diplomatic resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue and agreed that North Korea should return to the negotiating table without further delay.

Secretary Rice I shared the view that the resumption of the Six Party Talks itself is not the objective, that it is more important to achieve the progress for the resolution of the nuclear issue. To this end, we agreed to continue to cooperate with each other.

Our two countries are ready to discuss the negotiating issues of concern, including those of North Korea at the Six-Party Talks (SPTs) framework. Within the concept of the SPTs, the diverse format of discussion, including direct dialogue between the U.S. and North Korea, would be possible. Secretary Rice and I agreed to continue to consult closely on many issues of mutual interest, including the North Korean nuclear issue.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: I was delighted to come here early to emphasize how much value that United States has organized to the relationship, the alliance with the Republic of Korea, based on democratic values. We have to share together that we have been able to maintain peace and stability in the Asia Pacific and the economic prosperity in this region as well as the Republic of Korea.

But of course, our relationship is also global and I would like to thank the Korean people for their contributions to Iraq, and we are in Afghanistan where there are vital contributions towards peace and disperse democracy in the most difficult places.

Foreign Minister Ban and I shared the commitment to a peaceful solution in this Korean Peninsula. We will develop maximum efforts to our work in the SPTs, the multilateral diplomacy that should be ended to North Korea's nuclear ambitions and to its nuclear weapons program. We also agreed that the SPTs are the best way for North Korea to receive the respect, desires and the assistance that they need. We will continue to coordinate very, very closely on this issue.

I am sure that, over lunch, we will have an opportunity to talk about the alignment of U.S. Forces Korea that is now underway, a re-alignment that will return valuable urban land to the Korean people while we continue to modernize the alliance so that it will maintain peace and stability on the peninsula.