

The Universal Process for Settling Historic Problems:

"The Japanese Need to Make A Genuine Apology as Well as Reparations If Need Be,"

President Roh

The following are excerpts from a speech by South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun at the ceremony for the 86th March First Independence Movement Day at the Yu Gwan-sun Memorial on March 1, 2005. -Ed.

The March First Independence Movement is really a proud part of our history. The spirit of the March First Independence Movement proclaimed the values of liberty, equality of all persons, sovereignty and independence of the state, all respected as universal principles for societies and the international order even today.

Recalling that controversies over the issue of opening the country during the waning days of the Great Han Empire led to divisions that went deeper than debate and eventually caused national leaders to betray the country and the people, I deeply thought about what we should do today. I also pondered the importance of national power.

The relations between Korea and Japan have made significant progress in legal and political terms. In 1995, Japanese Prime Minister Murayama expressed painful reflection and apology. In 1998, President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Obuchi declared a New ROK-Japan Partnership. In 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi and I announced a joint statement on Co-operation in an Age of Peace and Prosperity in Northeast Asia.

Korea and Japan share the same destiny in working together to open the age of Northeast Asia. Unless we pursue the path toward the consolidation of peace and common prosperity through mutual cooperation, our two countries cannot guarantee the safety and happiness of our citizens. Progress in legal and political terms alone will not guarantee the future of the two countries. With only that, we cannot say that we did all we ought to. More than that, it is necessary to exert efforts for substantial reconciliation and cooperation.

We should be born again as a genuine neighbor by bringing down, with truth and sincerity, the mental wall blocking the two peoples.

Thus far, our government has been restrained not to incite wrath and hatred among the

people and has been making a positive effort to promote reconciliation and cooperation. In fact, I think that our people have been acting discreetly with restraint and reason.

In honor of the progress made in relations between Korea and Japan so far, I proclaimed that I would not make a diplomatic issue out of the historic problems involving the two countries. There has been no change in my thinking. The reason is that whenever a historic issue rear its head, bilateral exchanges and cooperation tended to stall and conflict rose to the detrimental of the future.

However, the problem cannot be solved by our efforts alone. To further develop relations between the two of us, sincere efforts are needed on the part of the government and people of Japan. They need to find out the truth about their past, reflect on it and make a genuine apology as well as reparations if need be and then reconcile. This is the universal process for settling historic problems in all the other parts of the world.

I fully understand the indignation of Japan stemming from its citizens being kidnapped. But at the same time, I would like to ask Japan to reflect on itself as well. I hope that Japan understands the indignation of the Korean people who suffered pain countless times as forced draftees and "comfort women" during the 36 years of its imperial rule.

Once again, I appeal to the conscience of Japan. I hope that Japan, based on its genuine self-reflection, will take the initiative in removing the deep-seated emotional hurdle between the two neighbors and heal the scar. In this way, Japan that prides itself as an advanced nation will be able to project itself as a conscientious nation as well.

Otherwise, it will not be able to get out of the yoke of the past. In the same light, however strong it may become in the area of economy and military preparedness, it will be difficult for Japan to earn the trust of its neighbors and become a leading nation in the international community.

Germany did all it could do. As a result, it was treated very well. The Germans delved into the past on their own, made apology and made reparations - and through their decisive moral action, they were able to emerge as the leader of integrated Europe.

Regarding the Korea-Japan Treaty on Basic Relations and in the matter concerning compensation, the government sees some deficiency.

The government thinks that the normalization of diplomatic relations was inescapable. Korea could not have afforded to be left without relations with Japan forever. The Korean government at that time might have had reasons for failing to get all it wanted to get. But from the standpoint of individuals who suffered under Japanese rule, the Korean government's

action to dispose of individual compensation claims one-sidedly might have been hard to understand.

Belatedly, the government will work actively to solve this problem. The government will listen to opinions of the general public and consult with the National Assembly in an effort to reach an appropriate conclusion. Already, the prime minister's office has organized a government-civilian committee to discuss ways to settle the issue. The government also plans to form a national advisory committee to collect more comprehensive views on ways to resolve the question.

In parallel with the work on the compensation claims, the government will strive to find other truths that have been buried so far while implementing related matters, including recovering remains of Korean victims in Japan so that they may be carried back home. I hope that Japan will be able to demonstrate a positive attitude in this regard. These matters involve universal human ethics and neighborly trust transcending legal implications.

As we are reminded of the spirit of the March First Independence Movement, let us march forward boldly into the future and build the advanced Korea that our ancestors had envisioned. We will be led by the courage of our patriots who stood up against the sword and guns of imperial Japan. We will be guided by the spirit of sacrifice and national solidarity that was so clearly demonstrated on this day.