

For Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula:

N. Korea Agreed to Abandon All Nuclear Weapons and Programs And Return to NPT

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning at an early date to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards," said a joint statement, issued by the end of the second session of the Fourth Round of Six-Party Talks.

After a 37-day recess, the fourth round of talks resumed on September 13 with the participating nations. "The six parties unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the Six-Party Talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner," said the joint statement.

It was the first concrete result to come out from the multilateral negotiations that convened in August 2003, only to be bogged down by conflicting interests and most recently boycotted for over a year by North Korea.

The statement said that the participants agreed to take steps to implement the agreement in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action." The three-page statement on the principles of how to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula has significant meaning, however, as it successfully framed the guidance to the permanent peace in Northeast Asia.

North Korea and the U.S. undertook to respect each other's sovereignty, exist peacefully together and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies, the statement said. In addition, the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum, the statement said.

North Korea stated that it has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, while the other parties expressed their respect and agreed to discuss, at an appropriate time, the subject of the provision of a light-water reactor to North Korea. The statement also effectively elaborated on other key issues in what delegates preferred to call "creative ambiguity."

Christopher Hill, the top U.S. negotiator, praised the result as a "win-win situation," but said that "verification" is the most important process to be conducted before considering the provision of a light-water reactor. He urged North Korea to keep its promises by terminating the nuclear facility at Yongbyon as soon as possible. "What is the purpose of operating it at this point?" Hill said, "The time to turn it off would be about now."

In a way to address the North's argument that it cannot disarm under the U.S. nuclear threat, Washington affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula, and has no intention to attack or invade North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons, the six-point statement said.

Responding to the North Korea's pledge to give up nuclear weapons, the world hailed South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and praised the agreement as the beginning of actual progress toward the resolution of the North Korean nuclear

dispute and securing peace on the Korean Peninsula. Roh noted that the joint statement also includes "efforts for peace on the Korean Peninsula and normalizing North Korea-U.S. ties as well as North Korea- Japan relations," according to the Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Mansoo.

U. S. President George W. Bush said, "North Korea's pledge to end its nuclear weapons programs is a positive step," but he expressed some skepticism about whether Pyongyang would live up to its promises. "What we have said is great. That is a wonderful step forward. Now, we have got to verify whether that happens. The question is that over time, will all parties adhere to the agreement?" said Bush.

The Six-Party Talks, seeking to persuade North Korea into dismantling its nuclear programs, ended with a long-awaited principle document, which was adopted by all participants on September 19. For Pyongyang, it was a matter of principle. While it would be willing to sacrifice its nuclear weapons program in order to find peace with its neighbors, as a sovereign nation, it should not be stripped of its right to have a peaceful energy program.

China's state guesthouse Diaoyutai saw a defining moment in history. The adoption of the joint statement, aiming to reaffirm the "verifiable denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula, came after a series of tiresome negotiations, which began in August 2003.

At around 9 a.m., the two negotiators joined four others from North Korea, host China, Russia and Japan to review a draft statement of principles before making the final decision. After hours of agonizing moments, reporters around the building heard a big round of applause burst out in the main hall at around 12:00 p.m.

Compared to the first session of talks, which ended on August 7 with host China summarizing six key differences to be resolved, these discussions appear likely to be more focused and detailed. The first session, which lasted 13 days, failed to produce a joint statement as the U.S. and North Korea agreed to disagree on the key issue - the scope of nuclear dismantlement and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The controversial topic was reportedly contained in subsection 2 of section 1 of the final draft, outlined in two and a half pages by China.

On September 15, North Korea began to talk publicly about its need to have the light-water reactor. "Providing a light-water reactor is a matter of principle for building trust," Hyun Hakbong, a spokesman of the Pyongyang delegation, said in the first comment since the talks resumed on Sep. 13. "The U.S. says it cannot give us a light-water reactor no matter what. Washington is telling us to give up the nuclear programs first without doing its part."

On September 16, China proposed a revised draft, reflecting North Korea's demand in it. The proposal contains "compromise wording which could satisfy both sides," said Russia's top delegate Alexander Alexeyev. It was later known that the draft asserted Pyongyang's right to peaceful nuclear activities after it disarms. But Pyongyang said that it will not first give up the nuclear programs with no concessions. "We will not give up our nuclear programs before the U.S. nuclear threat is removed from the Korean Peninsula," Hyun said. "The U.S. should not even dream about us accepting such a brigandish demand."

On September 18, Hill said that it was time to "put the cards on the table." "Everyone knows each other's positions. Everyone knows the agreement.

Everyone can almost recite it from memory at this point, so I am not sure we have to do too much talking," Hill said. He

added that the issue is tactics of how the participants express elements in the principle documents. "Some delegations prefer to leave some things more ambiguous. My delegation would like to see things less ambiguous," Hill said.

Pyongyang had been demanding that the statement says for it "abandon" nuclear weapons and programs instead of "dismantle." Responding to Pyongyang's claims that it needs atomic weapons for defense, North Korea and the United States pledged to respect each other's sovereignty and right to peaceful coexistence, and also to take steps to normalize relations.

Japan also agreed to normalize relations with the communist state in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, on the basis of the settlement of its unfortunate past and the outstanding issues of concern, apparently referring to North Korea's kidnapping of the Japanese to train spies in the 1980s.

The South Korean government welcomed the outcome, while highlighting the leading role it has played in reaching the breakthrough. "The joint statement, which comprehensively carries all relevant subjects, will not only solve the North's nuclear problem but also serve as an opportunity for substantial progress in settling peace on the peninsula," Cheong Wa Dae spokesman Kim Man-soo said in a statement.

All delegates stood up and clapped when Wu announced the finalization of the joint statement after 50 days of negotiating in the fourth round of talks that also suffered five weeks of recess.

The joint statement on North Korea's pledge to dismantle its nuclear programs marked a new chapter in the three-year nuclear standoff by successfully breaking the communist state's grip on its atomic weapons programs. However, the statement on principles - elaborated mostly in ambiguous phrases - also signaled a tough and complicated road ahead for the six parties, who must now sit and negotiate how and when to transform the agreed principles into action. "The joint statement, while it does not bring the ultimate solution to the problem, basically proved that it is possible for the relevant parties to sit down and discuss the North's nuclear issue in a reasonable manner," said Prof.

Kim Sung-han of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security. "There are a lot more mountains to climb now," he added.

Based on the statement of principles, the parties made clear that North Korea commits to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, and returns at an early date to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

In return, North Korea gains a pledge of security assurance from Washington, normalization of relations with Japan and the United States, economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, and a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at a separate forum - all of which have been the major demands by the North.

In the statement issued in Beijing, the countries involved confirmed their commitment to lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The "directly related parties" will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at a separate forum, the statement said.

The North, however, claimed the appropriate time for its return to the NPT comes after the United States first provides nuclear power plants to the North. "As clarified in the joint statement, we will return to the NPT and sign the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA and comply with it immediately upon the U.S. provision of light-water reactors, as a basis of

confidence-building to us," a spokesman for the North Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement released by the country's Korean Central News Agency.

The U.S. State Department dismissed the claim and said that the North's demand for atomic reactors is not in line with the agreement. "This was obviously not the agreement that they signed. We will see what the coming weeks bring," said Sean McCormack, a spokesman for the State Department.

South Korean analysts believe the different interpretations by Washington and Pyongyang represent their longheld difference on whether the communist North should be allowed to retain its right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, while also forecasting a reenactment of the contentious debate between the two in future negotiations.

The next step is the preservation of peace on the peninsula, which can be achieved by changing the armistice agreement that ended the 1950-53 internecine Korean War to a peace treaty, driving out the last legacy of the Cold War era from the international community.

But the peace regime on the peninsula cannot be realized without the removal of conflicts between Pyongyang and Washington. In this regard, the North and the United States need to establish diplomatic relations as quickly as possible. It is not hard to imagine that Pyongyang will be more eager than Washington to achieve the goal in order to safeguard its system, even though the agreement made it clear that the U.S. will not attack the North with either nuclear warheads or conventional arms.

As the agreement is only the first step to defuse the nuclear confrontation between the North and the U.S. that began nearly three years ago, the five other participants ought to enhance cooperation to make the peninsula nuclear free and preserve a permanent peace.

Most of all, Washington ought to stop activities provoking the North as long as the communist regime keeps its three main promises for a peaceful resolution to the nuclear crisis.

Under the 1994 deal known as the Agreed Framework, the United States agreed to provide fuel for North Korea until an international consortium built light-water nuclear reactors to generate power.

Under that deal, North Korea was rewarded with a US\$4.6 billion project to build two light-water reactors in Sinpo, South Hamkyong Province, in return for its promise to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear weapons program.

When the North wins the trust and confidence of the international community by faithfully observing global nuclear regulations, nobody can deny its demand for light water reactors, whose construction would have already progressed substantially if the North did not pursue nuclear ambitions. ★

The Full Text of Joint Statement

The following is the full text of a joint statement issued by six nations at the end of the Second Session of the Fourth Round of Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program, in Beijing on Sept. 19, 2005. - Ed.

For the cause of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia at large, the six parties held, in a spirit of mutual respect and equality, serious and practical talks concerning the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula on the basis of the common understanding of the previous three rounds of talks and agreed in this context to the following:

1. The six parties unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the Six-Party Talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner.

- The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning at an early date to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards.
- The United States affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons.
- The ROK (South Korea) reaffirmed its commitment not to receive or deploy nuclear weapons in accordance with the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, while affirming that there exist no nuclear weapons within its territory.
- The 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula should be observed and implemented.
- The DPRK stated that it has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The other parties expressed their respect and agreed to discuss at an appropriate time the subject of the provision of light-water reactor to the DPRK.

2. The six parties undertook, in their relations, to abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and recognized norms of international relations.

- The DPRK and the United States undertook to respect each other's sovereignty, exist peacefully together, and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies.
- The DPRK and Japan undertook to take steps to normalize their relations in accordance with the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, on the basis of the settlement of unfortunate past and the outstanding issues of concern.

3. The six parties undertook to promote economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade, and investment, bilaterally and/or multilaterally. China, Japan, the ROK, Russia and the U.S. stated their willingness to provide energy assistance to the DPRK. The ROK reaffirmed its proposal of July 12, 2005, concerning the provision of 2 million kilowatts of electric power to the DPRK.

4. Committed to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia, the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.

The six parties agreed to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in northeast Asia.

5. The six parties agreed to take coordinated steps to implement the aforementioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action."

6. The six parties agreed to hold the fifth round of the six party talks in Beijing in early November 2005 at a date to be determined through consultations. ★