

Call to ease or suspend the sanctions against the DPRK that impede the response to COVID-19

31 March 2020

On March 25th (local time), the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo asserted that “the G7, and all nations, must remain united in calling on North Korea to return to negotiations, and stay committed to apply diplomatic and economic pressure over its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programs.” This was a dismissal of remarks made the day before by Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, that “In a context of a global pandemic, both for global public health reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in these countries(the DPRK), sectoral sanctions should be eased or suspended.” Following to this, Secretary Pompeo had an interview with the media on the 26th saying that “Venezuela, North Korea, Iran, in some of these countries, when humanitarian assistance is offered, they’ll often reject it.” However, maintaining the level of pressure in the DPRK policies while taking their rejection of humanitarian assistance does nothing to mitigate the current situation. If the U.S. is willing to cooperate with the DPRK in preventing the COVID-19 epidemic as President Trump wrote in his personal letter to Kim, what is needed right now is to ease or suspend the sanctions against the DPRK imposed by the U.S. and UN, which are blocking any possibly effective response to COVID-19.

Calls for easing or suspending sanctions are continued, as COVID-19 is spreading on a global scale. Michelle Bachelet said that “Broad sectoral sanctions should urgently be re-evaluated in countries facing the coronavirus pandemic” and mentioned Cuba, the DPRK, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Iran to emphasize that sanctions may also impede medical efforts, which heightens the risk for all of us. António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, also sent a letter to G20 members and

encouraged them to waive sanctions to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. Humanitarian assistance groups of the U.S. also urge that sanctions against the DPRK should not impede the assistance.

The 1718 Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council is approving the requested humanitarian exemptions on a case-by-case basis and they recently shortened the duration of the procedure, but it is still not enough. Even the necessary medical supplies such as thermometers, RT-PCR machines, reagents, and resuscitators have to go through a complex process. In order to obtain the waiver, a wide-ranged submission of information that encompasses the purpose of the aid, the travel position of the items, the quantity and method of the shipment, travel route of the package, its value converted into dollars, the reasons for seeking an exemption, and the financial institutions that will be used, is required and there should be no changes in its operation. Besides, even if an exemption is granted, financial sanctions and the U.S. secondary boycott complicates the situation further because they make it difficult to find financial institutions to pay for the items and provide fund for resident NGOs or UN agencies in the DPRK. It is hard to deliver cash in person due to COVID-19 related restrictions, overall, assistances are met with severe adversity. Sanctions against the DPRK are blocking urgent and effective responses to a rapidly spreading epidemic.

The DPRK has reported that there is no case of COVID-19 up until now, but no one would be able to possibly predict situations to come. They have shut down flights since the beginning phase of proliferation and with other border controls, are said to be concentrating in the prevention of epidemics. Concurrently, they asked for reagent kits to Russia and medical supplies to Médecins Sans Frontières(MSF) and UNICEF, etc. Even if there is not a single case of infection, no country can be called safe unless a tight quarantine system in operation. There are no borders for a virus. Experts accentuate the importance of multilateral and international cooperation because if only one country fails to prevent and the outbreak goes out of control, it will pose the intensified level of threat to the whole world. Not just to '*support*' the

DPRK but also to jointly respond against COVID-19 as a whole, it is very urgent that some alteration in sanctions be made.

On March 26th, G20 leaders have hosted an extraordinary summit regarding responses to COVID-19 and agreed upon that 'global action, solidarity and international cooperation are more than ever necessary to address this pandemic.' A number of countries have been requesting the ROK for international cooperation as South Korean government's actions have been acclaimed for. Ironically, one country that the ROK cannot cooperate with is the DPRK, a country that resides on the same peninsula. Assistance from the ROK government and NGOs and inter-Korean cooperation on health care have been blocked by the sanctions. Effective mechanisms to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19 in the DPRK would expand supplies for prevention, quarantine, and treatment, which cannot possibly take place without an extensive easing or suspending sanctions against the DPRK and international cooperation. In addition, something that is as important as the elaborated agenda is the active participation of the DPRK to the proposals of the international society for cooperation to prevent the epidemic. Cooperation does not bear fruit by efforts that are one-sided.

Two Koreas, through the Inter-Korean Sectoral Meeting for Cooperation on Health Care that took place in November 2018, agreed upon ▷bilateral share of information to prevent the influx and spread of infectious diseases ▷cooperation on diagnosis, prevention and treatment of infectious diseases including tuberculosis and malaria ▷promotion of extensive mid and long-term cooperation projects for epidemics, health and medical care ▷regular discussions and resolutions through inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office. However, in a context of a global pandemic of COVID-19, these pacts are not carried out at all. This is a clear case that shows the progress of a peace process on the Korean peninsula is directly connected with people's safety. As António Guterres, UN Secretary-General had highlighted, "this is the time for solidarity, not exclusion." There is no time to hesitate. The U.S. and the international society must immediately ease or suspend sanctions that impede the response to COVID-19 in the DPRK.

87 CSOs in ROK

80 Millions' Movement for One Korea, Anti-THAAD Gimcheon Civil Action Committee, Childfund Korea, Citizen Solidarity for Participation & Autonomy of Chungbuk, Citizen Solidarity for Participation & Autonomy of Sejong, Citizens' Solidarity for Human Rights, Civil Peace Forum, Civilian Military Watch, Coal Briquettes for Neighbors in Korea, Committee of Reconciliation and Reunification in NCC-Korea, Cool-Jam, Cooperation for Peace and Prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, Corporation Nanum, Education Institutes for Workers, Gimje Justice Peace Act, Green KOREA, Hananuri, Health and Sharing, Hyungmyung Foundation, Incheon Citizen Culture Art Center, Incheon Movement for One Korea, Incheon Network for Making Peace City, Incheon Network for Peace & Welfare, Incheon Small Library Association, Incheon Urban Agriculture Network, Incheon Women's Association, Incorporated Organization Silcheon Bulgyo, Inmuyeon Humanities Center, Jeju Peace Human Rights Institute WHAT, Jeju People out of the Island, Jeju Solidarity for Participatory Self-government, Jeonnam Inter-Korean Exchanges Peace Center, Kaesong Tourism Resume Movement, Kimcheon Education Beyond, Korea Alliance For Progressive Movement(KAPM), Korea Association for Restorative Justice, Korea Biopolitics Forum, Korea Vietnam Peace Foundation, Korea Women's Associations United, Korea Women Alliance, Korean Catholic Women's Community for a New World, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, Korean Federation Medical Activist Groups for Health Rights(Association of Korea Doctors for health rights, Association of Physicians for Humanism, Korean Dentist's Association for Healthy Society, Korean Pharmacists for Democratic Society, Solidarity for Worker's Health), Korean House for International Solidarity, Korean Public Service and Transportation Worker's Union(KPTU), Korean Sharing Movement, Korean Women Peasants Association, Korean Women's Movement for Peacem, Medical Aid for Children, Naeil Corp for Youth Human Rights, National Council of YMCAs of Korea, Networks for Greentransport, New Bodhisattva Network, Nice People Foundation, Okedongmu Children in Korea, One Korea Tree, Pan Korean Association for Reconciliation, Pax Christi Korea, Peace and Human Rights Center in Jeju, Peace Network, Peace Railway of the Korea, Peacemomo, People not Profit, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy(PSPD), Professors for Democracy, SARANGBANG Group For Human Right, Seongju Soseongri Villagers' Association against THAAD, Solidarity for Another World, Solidarity for Independent Peaceful Reunification of Korea, Solidarity for Peace & Human Rights, The Center for Historical Truth and Justice, The Corea Peace 3000, The Headquarters of National Unification Movement of Young Korean Academy, The Korean Council for the Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, The Righteous People for Korean Unification, The Won-Buddhist Emergency Committee to Guard the Sacred Site at Seongju, Ulsan People's Solidarity, Unification Committee of MINBYUN-Lawyers for Democratic Society, Urinuri Peace Corp, West Sea Peace Zone Association, Women Making Peace, Won Buddhism Human Rights Commission, Won-Buddhists Social Movement Network

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