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Commemorative Address by President Park Geun-hye on the 70th Anniversary of Liberation

🕒 August 15, 2015

My fellow citizens, our seven million compatriots overseas, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

This is a historic day that marks both the 70th anniversary of our liberation and the 67th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea.

I join the entire Korean people in sharing the excitement and emotions that were felt on this day seventy years ago. I pay tribute to our forebears who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their nation's independence and the patriots who dedicated themselves to founding the Republic of Korea.

From the depths of my heart, I convey my gratitude to those who served the cause of independence with distinction and to their families.

Fellow citizens,

The last seventy years has been a truly extraordinary journey that placed the Republic of Korea on a strong foundation.

Seventy years ago today, propelled by the yearning for independence and through selfless struggle, the Korean people at last achieved the liberation of their fatherland.

The indomitable will and patriotism of those who gave their lives for this country formed the bedrock upon which the Republic of Korea would become the great nation that it is today.

It was also on this day sixty seventy years ago that the Government of the Republic of Korea was founded.

Over the years, our Republic of Korea has been carrying forward the time-honored heritage and

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legitimacy of the Korean people, safeguarding our free democracy and laying the groundwork for the enduring prosperity of the economy for both the nation and its people.

But the joy of the long-awaited liberation ended up being only half fulfilled.

The tragedy of our division and the ravages of the Korean War completely swept away the livelihood of our people. What meager industrial infrastructure we had collapsed thoroughly.

But we were far from daunted. Through unity of purpose and the strength of our people, our nation made great new strides forward.

With no capital, no technology, no experience to speak of, we nonetheless managed to erect steel mills and shipyards on barren grounds. We defied huge odds in building the Gyeongbu Expressway, which represents the main artery of our land.

Today, we have become a country producing some of the world's finest electronic goods, automobiles, steel, ships and petrochemical products, and we stand tall as an economic powerhouse with export figures that are the sixth largest in the world.

Only six countries on the planet are part of the so-called "5030 club" - nations with populations greater than fifty million and per capita income above thirty thousand dollars. I am confident that before long, the Republic of Korea will join the ranks of the 5030 club as its seventh member.

Now, the Republic of Korea is tapping into its expanded economic and national strength to proudly play a leading role in the international community.

It is the first erstwhile aid recipient to become an official donor country and is taking active part in the United Nations' peacekeeping activities.

As we share our development experience with the developing world, we are becoming a "cause for hope" in many countries that are aspiring to prosperity.

The Republic of Korea's record of achievements - described by the world as the miracle on the Han River - is the fruit of the blood, sweat and the indomitable enterprise of our people.

Together with the Korean people who, with such dauntless resolve, have been writing a creative and miraculous history, I intend to embark on a "grand journey for the Republic of Korea's renewed leap forward."

My fellow Koreans,

Even as we mark the 70th anniversary of our liberation, we are facing a weak global economy and a host of difficulties here at home and abroad.

If the Republic of Korea is to prevail over these challenges and leap towards a new future, I believe we must consummate the twin wings of a creative economy and cultural enrichment, which offer answers to the demands of the 21st century.

The government has put forward the creative economy as a new paradigm for the economy and has been working to bring this vision to fruition.

The establishment of all seventeen Centers for Creative Economy and Innovation in major cities and provinces was completed last month. Now, high quality start-up support services are available for anyone with creative ideas.

Local drivers of innovation and institutions can collaborate to nurture leading human talent and foster industries that cater to local strengths, and thus generate new engines of growth for their economies.

4,600 people are already receiving mentoring support and some 200 businesses are being incubated, while 23.5 billion won in investments have been raised.

I am convinced that the creative economy will serve as a driving force that injects vitality into our economy and helps propel the global economy. Looking ahead, the government will be vigorous in its support to make sure the creative economy becomes a new source of advancement for individuals and local economies.

The other wing is cultural enrichment.

Culture is potent in its power to bring together people across different languages and borders as one, inspire passion and enable people to share values.

With the potential to yield boundless economic value, culture also represents a key source of national competitiveness.

CATEGORY

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For this reason, countries around the world are focusing on expanding their cultural domains.

The Republic of Korea has a resplendent, unique culture that has continued throughout its venerable five-thousand-year history.

Our rapid development in the post-liberation era has also, on a fundamental level, been enabled by the enduring creative fiber and cultural caliber of our people.

When our time-honored culture – one that has attracted the attention of world - blossoms anew as it interacts with the world, the gateway to renewed takeoff could be unlocked.

By revisiting our traditional culture and rediscovering new value in them, we should promote convergence between culture and industry and harness that as a new pillar to rejuvenate our economy.

The government will take the first step by opening a Cultural Creation Convergence Belt.

Now open and waiting to welcome members of the cultural community, the Cultural Creation Convergence Belt will facilitate the convergence of culture with ideas and technology and lead to the creation of new economic value as well as jobs.

Insofar as the creative economy and cultural enrichment are engines that will propel our economic resurgence, the “four major reforms” of the public, labor, financial and education sectors form the basis for the innovation that will continue to power those engines.

I will do whatever it takes to accomplish these reforms and pass on to future generations a country brimming with hope.

We are at a point when all Koreans need to once again rally our collective strength with a unity of purpose to achieve this goal.

It is when we share each other’s burdens and go forward together, that we will be able to surmount the challenges that arise along the tough journey of reform and innovation.

Guided by the same indomitable spirit with which our ancestors transformed crises into opportunities, let us unite together with confidence and hope to achieve our next takeoff.

My fellow Koreans,

This year also marks, in addition to our liberation, the 70th year of our division into two Koreas.

True liberation will only come when we become a reunited people. South and North Korea must heal the wounds of the past and move hand in hand towards the future.

As the recent normalization of ties between the United States and Cuba and the Iranian nuclear deal attest, the international community is in the midst of a sweeping tide of change and cooperation.

But North Korea is treading the opposite path.

North Korea is conducting purges that are unlike any other in the world, and the North Korean people are trembling with fear.

North Korea has yet to take up our repeated offers to engage in dialogue, and is undermining peace and running counter to the cause of integrating the two Koreas.

North Korea is threatening our security and that of the international community by continuing to develop its nuclear capabilities and launching cyber-attacks.

In particular, the provocative emplacement of mines in the DMZ recently are a direct violation of the armistice agreement as well as the inter-Korea non-aggression accord. North Korea is trampling on the aspirations of Koreans to honor the 70th anniversary of liberation.

The government will respond firmly to any and all North Korean provocations that jeopardize the safety and security of our people.

North Korea must break free of the delusion that it will sustain its system through provocative acts and belligerence.

Provocations and belligerence bring nothing but isolation and ruin.

If, however, North Korea chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, it will be able to seize an opportunity to improve the lives of its people and lift up its economy.

In 1972, South and North Korea released a joint statement - the first ever since their partition - that embodied aspirations for peaceful unification through dialogue.

Relations between South and North Korea back then were far more fraught and frayed than they are now, and tensions on the Korean Peninsula ran very high.

But the determination to build a Korean Peninsula that is more peaceful, even if just a tad more, had prompted South and North Korea to muster the courage to sit down together.

Even now, there are opportunities available to North Korea.

North Korea needs to immediately cease its provocative behavior and nuclear development, which compound the suffering of a nation divided, and instead choose the path to easing military tensions and building trust.

Encountering the latest provocation in the DMZ, I was again reminded of the pressing need to construct a new zone of peace in the DMZ.

The seeds of peace must be sown as soon as possible in the DMZ - a place that is paradoxically the most militarized stretch of land in the world, where young South and North Koreans are pointing their weapons at each other.

Ever since I took office, I have been making a number of overtures to build a park of life and peace in the DMZ - the very symbol of our division - and have been refining this initiative.

All that remains is for the South and the North to take up the ground-breaking shovel.

Once we create a World Eco-Peace Park in the DMZ and reconnect severed railways and roads between the South and the North, the Baekdudaegan Mountain Range that penetrates the Peninsula will evolve into a new backbone for facilitating peaceful unification and realizing cooperation across Eurasia.

I call on North Korea to part with its provocative and belligerent ways and join us on the path to building a Korean Peninsula permeated by life and peace.

Furthermore, North Korea should also be earnest in seeking to help separated families, who have been spending the past seventy years in tears and agony, find closure.

Just as no child can exist without parents, I call on the North Korean leadership to be forward-leaning in addressing this problem with a view to alleviating the agony of family separation.

The issue of separated families is, if anything, one that beckons South and North Korea to find a fundamental solution in the service of humanity, however strained the political situation or deep our ideological divide may be.

Identifying whether or not family members are deceased would mark the first step.

To this end, we will send North Korea a comprehensive list of some sixty thousand separated family members in the South.

We hope North Korea also responds in kind, so we could realize the exchange of lists within this year.

We also call on North Korea to work with us so that family members from both sides can access the Mt. Geumgang reunion center and get back together from time to time.

Let us also tackle together natural disasters and safety challenges on the Korean Peninsula.

Instead of piecemeal situational responses to recurring problems such as floods, droughts and infectious diseases, the future of all Koreans would be better served by building a system of inter-Korean cooperation in healthcare, medicine and safety that allows for a more fundamental answer.

In the course of dealing with the recent outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, South and North Korea collaborated on handling quarantine at the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, and we are currently exploring ways to work together to tackle forest disasters at Mt. Geumgang.

We should combine our strengths to address challenges that are common to both the South and the North such as public health, sanitation, water resources and forestry management.

We must also restore a sense of common identity that has been undermined by seventy years of division.

If South and North Koreans meet and open their hearts through cultural and sports exchanges at the people-to-people level, a sense of homogeneity as one people will gradually return.

We will actively work to make sure that, despite our obstacles, academic and cultural exchanges such as the ongoing joint excavation of historic sites and the compilation of an unabridged dictionary of the Korean language, not to mention sports exchanges in soccer and taekwondo, move forward without interruption.

To our eighty million compatriots on the Peninsula and around the world,

Inter-Korean relations may be experiencing turbulence because of the North's repeated provocations, but this historic occasion of the 70th anniversary of our liberation behooves the Korean people to choose the path to closing the chapter on a divided history and achieving peaceful unification.

When the two Koreas are reunited as one, a new chapter of hope and miracles can unfold.

We can outdo the "Miracle on the Han River" with a "Miracle on the Korean Peninsula."

A peacefully-reunited Korean Peninsula will be free from the fear of nuclear weapons and war; a place where all eighty million enjoy freedom and human rights.

A Korea made whole will spur peace in East Asia and emerge to become a new engine of growth for the world that helps revitalize the global economy.

By combining the respective strengths of the two Koreas, linking the transport networks on the Peninsula with the rest of the continent, and building bridges between the Eurasian continent and Pacific economies, we will unleash ever greater opportunities not just for Korean businesses but also for individual people.

Let us all stand together and prepare for unification, and set our vision on a 100th anniversary where the dream of peaceful unification has become reality.

My fellow citizens,

On the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan last June, I laid out my determination to move towards a future of renewed cooperation and shared prosperity.

I did so because close friendship and cooperation between Korea and Japan are essential to the peace and prosperity of both countries and the rest of East Asia.

The government has been principled in addressing the issue of how history is viewed, even as we intend to actively push ahead with bilateral cooperation that serves our mutual interests, such as in the security, economic and social and cultural realms.

Since ties were normalized in 1965, the view of history articulated by the previous Japanese cabinets, including in the Kono Statement and the Murayama Statement, have been the key underpinnings of the Korea-Japan relationship.

In this sense, it is hard to deny that Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's statement of yesterday marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, did not quite live up to our expectations.

History cannot be hidden, but rather lives on through the testimony of surviving witnesses.

This notwithstanding, we take note of the message that was clearly conveyed to the international community; namely, that the position articulated by the previous Japanese cabinets, based on its apologies and remorse for how Japan's aggression and colonial rule caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries in Asia, and caused suffering to the "comfort women" victims, will remain unshakable into the future.

We sincerely hope that Japan will come forward and forge shared peace in Northeast Asia, as an open-hearted neighbor.

We look to the Japanese government to match with consistent and sincere actions its declaration that the view of history articulated by its previous cabinets will be upheld, and thereby win the trust of its neighbors and the international community.

In particular, we hope the Japanese government resolves the issue of "comfort women" victims of the Japanese Imperial Army in a speedy and proper way.

While considerable difficulties remain, it is high time for us to move forward to a new future guided by a correct view of history.

I also look forward to serving together the cause of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the world in a way that does justice to our standing in the international community.

My fellow Koreans,

Seventy years ago on this day, we regained our lost fatherland.

And with indomitable resolve and a sense of unity, we have been prevailing over countless adversities and building a nation of accomplishments and hope.

The mission that we are called upon to fulfill is to carry forward our forebears’ love and grand vision for the nation, peacefully reunite the Korean Peninsula, and thereby achieve the Republic of Korea’s renewed leap forward.

I and the government will lay the groundwork for sustained development through ceaseless innovation and build a strong nation that stands tall among nations - a country that is transparent and upright in its principles.

We will open the doors to an era of unification by being both firm in our principles but flexible in our response.

My fellow Koreans!

I call upon everyone to marshal our collective strength to fulfill the Republic of Korea’ “miracle of a century” and usher in an era of a reunited Peninsula.

Let us all stand together as one and build a peacefully unified Peninsula. Let us thereby chart a bright future as a country that helps spearhead prosperity across the global village; a country that helps bring happiness to humanity through culture.

Thank you.

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