Nuclear Risk Reduction and Disarmament in Northeast Asia
by Peace Depot Inc. Japan

NPT NGO session, May 3, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates, civil society colleagues,

The military tension in Northeast Asia continues to remain extremely high these months, with the US Secretary of State stating in March that “all options are on the table” to solve the current crisis in the Korean Peninsula, and with the US President tweeting in April, “if (China does) not (decide to help), we will solve the problem without them”. There is an imminent danger that a nuclear war might happen at any moment, triggered by accident or miscalculation.

We can no longer wait to find a sustainable solution to settle the nuclear and security issues in Northeast Asia. And in doing so, we need to be aware that the current crisis has a deeply rooted historical background.

Ever since the Korean War ceased fire in 1953, the Armistice Agreement has never been replaced by a peace treaty. For as long as 34 years (from 1958 to 1991), the United States deployed tactical nuclear weapons on the soil of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Joint military exercises have continuously been conducted between the US and ROK, with the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea (DPRK) targeted as a potential enemy. Even after the Cold War, the hostile policy of the West continues towards the DPRK, putting it under the persistent threat of US nuclear weapons.

It was in this situation that the DPRK said at the UN General Assembly, “As long as (the US) continues their nuclear blackmail, the DPRK (...) will continue to further bolster its self-defense nuclear forces in quality and quantity” (Ri Tong-II, DPRK Ambassador, October 2016). Then, the ROK and Japan request the United States to strengthen its extended nuclear deterrence. This nuclear escalation has generated a new arms race involving ballistic missile defense (BMD), which creates tension among nations including China and Russia. Stopping this negative spiral is our imperative.

Requesting only to the DPRK the abandonment of the nuclear program is not the right solution to end the vicious circle. It is necessary to comprehensively solve a set of closely inter-linked issues, including turning the Armistice into a Peace Treaty, prohibiting the nuclear armament of the ROK and Japan, and security assurances for non-nuclear states in the region.
As an essential part of a comprehensive solution, the concept of a Northeast Asia-Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ) has been discussed by academics and NGOs. The Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA) proposed a “Comprehensive Framework Agreement for the Denuclearization of Northeast Asia” in 2015, which aims to establish a NEA-NWFZ, together with measures to solve other key issues for peace and security in the region. As for the NWFZ a “three plus three (3+3)” arrangement has been proposed. Under this arrangement, there will be two categories of states: the intra-zonal non-nuclear states, the ROK, DPRK and Japan, and the surrounding nuclear weapon states, the US, China and Russia. The latter category of states will provide negative security assurance to the former.

In the ROK and Japan, there have been parliamentary efforts to push the idea of a NEA-NWFZ. Ninety-two parliamentarians from the ROK and Japan have joined a statement to support a NEA-NWFZ. In Japan in 2008, a major parliamentary group of the then leading opposition party, Democratic Party of Japan, headed by a former Foreign Minister, released a model treaty for a NEA-NWFZ. At the local governmental level in Japan, as many as 546 heads of municipality have signed on a statement to establish a NEA-NWFZ. In addition, a new movement of religious leaders started recently, with a powerful statement “Call(ing) for Japan to Stop Relying on the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella and to Move toward the Establishment of a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.” Also there was a significant development at the UN: the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to the Secretary General recommended in 2013 that the UN consider appropriate action for the establishment of a NEA-NWFZ.

Risk reduction of nuclear war in the region is a matter of urgency. It is necessary to build a regional mechanism that equally frees the citizens of the DPRK, ROK and Japan from nuclear threats. We should turn the current crisis into an opportunity to take action for sustainable regional peace and security. We request the concerned governments to take a bold step towards negotiation, rather than threatening each other to the brink of war.

Thank you.

Contact: Peace Depot Office
1-30-27-4, 1F Hiyoshi-honcho, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama, 223-0062 Japan
office@peacedepot.org, http://www.peacedepot.org/
tel: +81-45-563-5101, fax: +81-45-563-9907