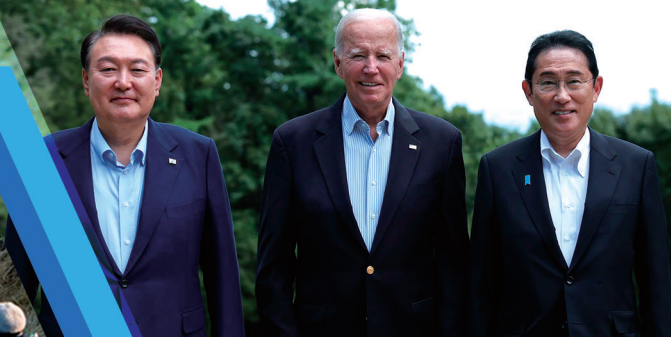




PSCORE
People for Successful COrean REunification
(사)성공적인 통일을 만들어가는 사람들

사단법인
북한인권
NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS

North Korean Human Rights Issues and the Camp David Summit



North Korean Human Rights Issues and the Camp David Summit

This booklet has been produced based on the main contents of the seminar titled 'North Korean Human Rights and the Camp David Declaration' held on September 25, 2023 and Professor Lee Shin-hwa's paper on the importance and challenges of international legal and strategic approaches to the North Korean human rights issue. Professor Lee Shin-hwa currently serves as the Ambassador for International Cooperation on North Korean Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

PREFACE



President Yoon Suk-yeol of South Korea, President Joseph R. Biden of the United States, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan held a historic summit at the renowned Camp David in the United States, a location known for yielding crucial agreements.

At the summit, the leaders of the three countries adopted three documents: the ‘Spirit of Camp David,’ ‘Camp David Principles,’ and a ‘Commitment to Consult.’ These documents are momentous as they foreshadow an era of intensive collaboration.

In a political climate reminiscent of the Cold War, a new era of collaboration is emerging among three liberal democratic nations. Together, they constitute a formidable force, contributing to one-third of the world’s GDP and trade volume. Faced with the evolving dynamics of this contemporary Cold War scenario, these nations have made an explicit commitment to form a unique alliance, drawing parallels to Europe’s NATO. Their joint resolution extends beyond the Indo-Pacific region, signifying a collective determination to assume leadership in shaping the global order.

Moreover, the following declaration made by the three leaders regarding the Camp David Principles is particularly significant as it shows formal support for South Korea’s policy of achieving peaceful reunification through the improvement of human rights in North Korea: “We will pursue the immediate resolution of human rights and humanitarian issues, including the problems of detainees, captives, and the prompt repatriation of prisoners of war. We support a free and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula based on our ‘peaceful unification policy grounded in a liberal democratic order.’”

In 2023, we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of a UN resolution aimed at addressing the severe and lingering human rights crisis in North Korea. Additionally, this year also marks the 10th anniversary since the establishment of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI), dedicated to addressing crimes against humanity in North Korea.



However, the human rights situation in North Korea shows no signs of improvement since it is still being overshadowed by the North Korean regime's fervor for nuclear and missile development. Many North Korean residents continue to face human rights abuses, which includes strict information control, political prisoner camps, sexual violence, forced labor and prolonged famine among women and children. Amidst this human rights crisis, North Korean defectors in China are facing this imminent threat of forced repatriation.

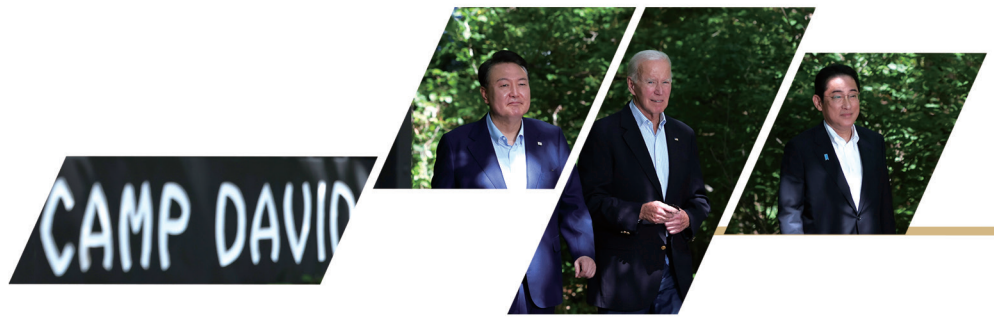
In the face of such alarming human rights conditions in North Korea, we can no longer remain silent. We believe that the current moment is a crucial opportunity to leverage the invaluable Camp David spirit, principles, and commitments to find solutions for the improvement of North Korean human rights.

We hope that this booklet, although limited in its scope, can help many individuals, including governments, NGOs, international organizations, and human rights activists, who are working towards ground-breaking efforts to significantly improve and address the appalling human rights issues in North Korea, especially in the wake of the Camp David Summit involving South Korea, the United States, and Japan.

December 2023

Kim, Tae-Hoon

President, North Korean Human Rights Corporation &
People for Successful COrean REunification (PSCORE)



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Chapter 1

The Realities of North Korean Human Rights

To appropriately tackle the North Korean human rights issue, it is vital to thoroughly comprehend the on-the-ground realities. Concentrating solely on human rights abuses against North Korean residents offers a limited perspective of the accurate human rights situation in North Korea. This limitation stems from the intricate and complex nature of human rights issues intertwined with various issues. Hence, it is essential to carefully scrutinize the diverse types of human rights abuses perpetrated by the North Korean authorities. Only through this nuanced understanding can a clear and effective strategy for promoting human rights be formulated.

1. Groups Subjected to Human Rights Violations by the North Korean Regime

The primary victims of human rights abuses are undoubtedly the residents within North Korea. These individuals, due to the regime's inhumane treatment, not only have their fundamental rights violated but they also face significant threats to their right to life.

Then, the second group of victims includes defectors who are now residing in various countries as well as the North Korean overseas laborers. Why would those abroad be considered targets of human rights abuses by the North Korean regime? The reason is that despite being outside of the geographical boundaries of North Korea, they are still not enjoying complete freedom since they are still under the scrutiny and control of the North Korean authorities.

Finally, there is the issue of individuals forcibly disappeared by North Korean authorities. This group encompasses prisoners of war(POWs), abductees from both wartime and post-war periods, as well as detainees. Presently, the precise size of these groups can only be approximated, with their status, whether alive or deceased, remaining uncertain due to the dearth of information from North Korea.



North Korean Human Rights
'Back Step' Illustration
Source: JoongAng Ilbo

2. Human Rights Conditions of North Korean Residents

a. Violations of Fundamental Rights

Residents within North Korea are deprived of the basic freedoms and rights guaranteed by international human rights norms. The reason North Korean residents cannot enjoy these fundamental rights is that the authorities prioritize ‘regime security’ as the utmost priority, ignoring universal values such as human rights. Adhering to the stance that “there are no human rights issues internally,” the North Korean regime employs its coercive powers to suppress the freedom of its residents.



North Korean border guards inspect residents
Source: AFP

b. Surveillance, Censorship, and Punishment

In particular, the North Korean regime, through its internal security organizations, watch over its residents by instilling fear through inhumane practices such as torture, imprisonment, forced labor, and public executions. Additionally, the North Korean government has implemented stringent restrictions on media, religion, and assembly. Any violations of these restrictions can result in detention in various facilities, including detention centers, labor training camps, re-education centers, and political prisoner camps.

c. Strengthening Control over the Inflow of External Information

The North Korean regime views the inflow of external information as the principal security threat. Consequently, they have strengthened their control over the citizens’ access to and sharing of information from the outside world.

Particularly during the three years of the pandemic, they introduced a series of laws, including the “Reactionary Ideology Culture Rejection Act,” the “Protection of Youth Culture Act,” and the “Protection of Pyongyang Language and Culture Act.” Through these legislative initiatives, the regime aims to deepen the isolation of North Korea by creating a ‘black box’ environment. Individuals found guilty of violating these laws encounter severe consequences and harsh punishments.



Reactionary Ideology Culture Rejection Act (Enacted December 2022)
Source: KTV

d. Human Rights of Vulnerable Groups

The human rights conditions for vulnerable groups (women, children and disabled persons) in North Korea are particularly critical. Especially, women who, within the patriarchal structure of North Korean society, confront the harsh realities of human trafficking and various forms of violence. Detention facilities, in particular, have been reported as sites of serious gender-based human rights violations. Children, who are still in need of protection, find themselves compelled to engage in forced labor in various workplaces. Meanwhile, individuals with disabilities face restrictions on their permitted place of residence, and in some cases are shunned from society.

3. Human Rights Conditions of Overseas North Korean Residents

a. Human Rights of North Korean Defectors in China

Focusing on North Korean defectors living in China is crucial given the country's geographical proximity, making it a prime destination for North Koreans following their defection. However, China's policies recognize North Korean defectors as illegal economic migrants, not as refugees, exposing North Korean defectors to the possibility of forced repatriation back to North Korea.

① Legal Status of Defectors in China

China's refusal to acknowledge North Korean defectors as refugees is rooted in agreements such as the 'Sino-North Korean Agreement on the Transfer of Fugitives' and legislation addressing national security and social stability in border areas that categorize defectors as illegal residents. Furthermore, the UNHCR office in China diverges from the UNHCR's perspective, which advocates for the inclusion of North Korean defectors in the local refugee category. Instead, the Chinese UNHCR office adheres to the policies of the Chinese authorities, leading to obstructiveness and ultimately posing challenges to the protection of North Korean defectors in China.



Interview with a North Korean defector in China
Source: AP

② Forced Repatriation Practices in China

The issue of North Korean defectors in China has consistently garnered attention and even more so since the reopening of the North Korean border in 2023. The reopening of the border signifies the conclusion of a 3-year and 7-month blockade imposed during the pandemic and reveals that forced repatriations in China are on the rise. Subsequently, by early October 2023, around 600 out of the identified 2,600 North Korean defectors in China have undergone forced repatriation, while the remaining individuals are at a heightened risk of facing the same fate. A major concern arises from the continuous advancements in China's artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in facial recognition technology. This progress has led to heightened monitoring through CCTV and strengthened surveillance capabilities, making it exceedingly challenging for North Korean defectors to escape without being detected.

③ Limitations in the International Community's Pressure on China regarding North Korean Human Rights.

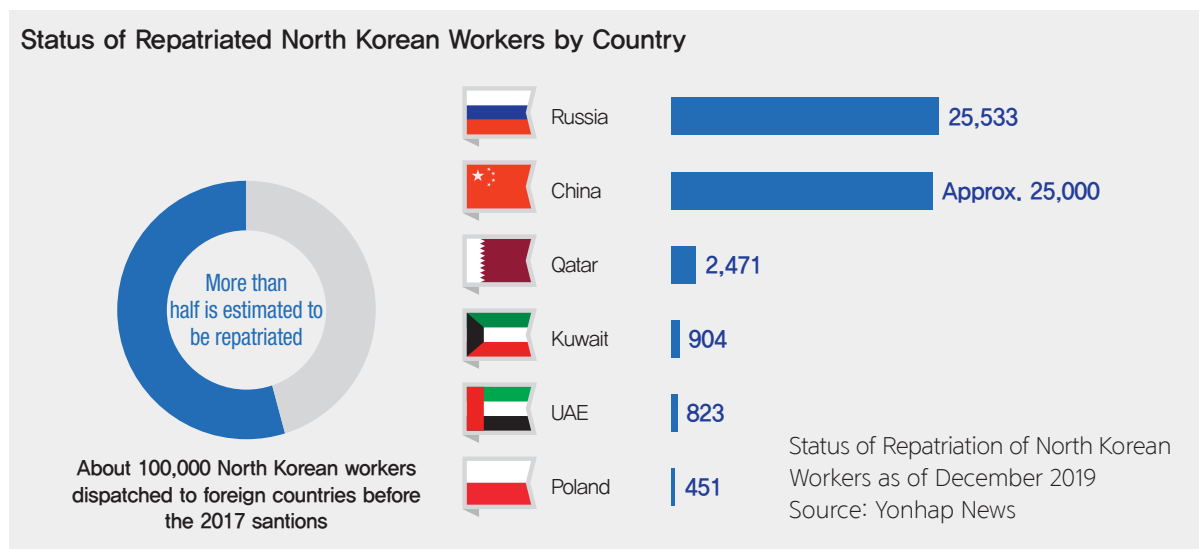
Despite continuous international criticism against China regarding the North Korean defector issue, China maintains considerable influence over various UN policies, particularly those addressing global refugee concerns. The key factor is China's consistent increase in financial support for refugee issues, consequently expanding the Chinese influence on a range of UN policies. In this regard, China's influence in the global refugee issue remains extensive despite the ongoing criticism against it for its stance on the North Korean defector problem.

b. Human Rights of Overseas North Korean Workers

The North Korean workers dispatched abroad are referred to as the 'Modern Slaves' mobilized for 'Loyalty Fundraising Movement.' They are engaged in forced and illegal labor, working over 12 hours a day, providing cheap labor to earn foreign currency. In a situation where even holidays are not properly given, they are facing a structural contradiction where 70-90% of their earnings must be forcibly handed over to the North Korean regime. The Kim Jong-un regime utilizes the exploitation of overseas dispatched workers to secure foreign currency, using it for the Kim family's personal funds, luxury purchases, and national projects such as nuclear and missile development.

① Deployment Status of North Korean Overseas Workers

As per UN Security Council Resolution 2397, the dispatch of North Korean workers abroad has been banned, and every country is obligated to repatriate all such workers since December 2019. Contrary to this, the “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” published by the U.S. Department of State reveal that North Korea is presently deploying workers in 22 nations, such as China and Russia. When North Korea sends its workers abroad, it is primarily for employment in sectors such as construction, healthcare, and IT. Through these endeavors, it is estimated that North Korea is earning approximately \$300 million in foreign currency annually.



② Exploitative Structure of North Korean Overseas Workers

Workers from North Korea sent abroad often lack awareness of labor laws in their host countries, leaving them without knowledge of their legal rights. This circumstance frequently results in extensive exploitation, characterized by poor working conditions combined with the absence of proper representation. To monitor the movements and activities of these workers, North Korea has implemented various surveillance measures, including deploying security agents, establishing group surveillance systems, and monitoring individual mobile phone usage. These measures create a structure that makes it nearly impossible for workers to leave their workplace.



Kim Jong-un visited Russia
(September 2023)
Source: JoongAng Ilbo

③ Concerns over the Rising Number of Dispatched North Korean Workers in Russia

North Korea's economic development plans in 2023 amid the global COVID-19 situation have been focused on fostering closer ties with Russia, suggesting that the number of North Korean laborers being dispatched to Russia will most likely continue to increase, therefore heightening the concerns about the conditions of North Korean overseas dispatched workers.

4. Issue of Forced Disappearances

Families who have been impacted by forced disappearances orchestrated by North Korea, consistently advocate for the return of their missing loved ones. However, the closed nature of North Korean society makes it challenging to obtain accurate information regarding the current status of these victims. Even confirming the exact circumstances surrounding the forced disappearance of victims proves to be a difficult task.

a. Prisoners of War

As a result of the Korean War, the issue of North Korean prisoners of war (POWs) arose. Around the time of the armistice, the UN estimated the number of POWs to be around 82,000, however, the number of POWs North Korea allowed to be repatriated to South Korea was only 8,800. North Korea claims that the remaining prisoners wanted to stay voluntarily and has consistently refused repatriation.



Status of South Korean Abductees
(May 2017)
Source: Segye Ilbo

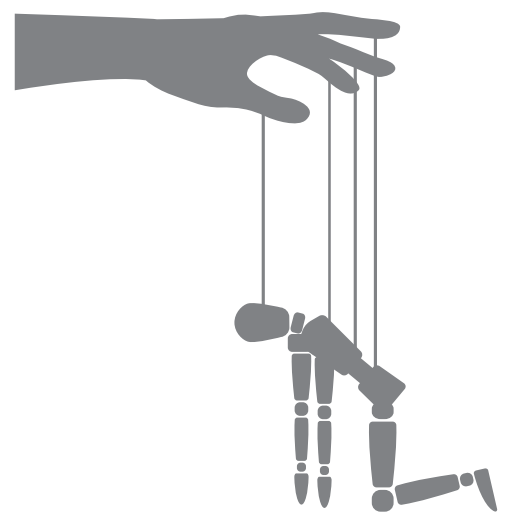
b. Disappeared Individuals Before and After the Korean War

During the Korean War, around 80,000 to 90,000 individuals were captured, with 516 confirmed as South Korean nationals. However, given the advanced age of the surviving captives, it is anticipated that the current number of survivors is extremely low. Additionally, the fate of the remaining South Korean detainees is quite uncertain. Japan has officially recognized 17 individuals as Japanese nationals among the captives. Following the return of five individuals after the 2002 summit between Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi and Kim Jong-Il, Japan has affirmed its

dedication to continue national efforts aimed at receiving the remains of the remaining 12 individuals.

c. Discrimination Against Forced Disappearance Victims

As per the 2023 Human Rights Report on North Korea from the Ministry of Unification, North Korea engages in systematic discrimination against victims of forced disappearance, affecting their daily lives and infringing upon various aspects of their rights and societal engagements. Specifically, military personnel face stigmatization as they are separately managed under directive “No. 43,” subjecting even their immediate families to surveillance. Discrimination is evident across many domains such as education, employment, political party affiliation, and military service. Likewise, those held captive or detained become victims of human rights abuses under the surveillance and discriminatory practices of the North Korean regime.





Chapter 2

Camp David Summit

On August 18, 2023, South Korea, the United States, and Japan convened a historic summit at the renowned Camp David in the United States, celebrated for its role in facilitating crucial agreements.

During this summit, the three leaders approved three essential documents: the ‘Camp David Principles,’ offering lasting guidelines for the ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation; and the ‘Spirit of Camp David,’ outlining the vision and methods for implementing cooperation; as well demonstrating a heightened commitment to improving discussions within the ‘Commitment to Consult’. This chapter will explore the significance of the Camp David ROK-U.S.-Japan summit and delve into the key contents of the Camp David Principles, Spirit, and Commitment to Consult.

1. The Significance of the Camp David ROK-U.S.-Japan Summit

A Historic New Chapter in South Korea-U.S.-Japan Cooperation

In the face of unprecedented and multifaceted challenges, it is crucial for the most advanced liberal democracies and economic power houses in the region, namely South Korea, the United States, and Japan, to forge a robust alliance. These three nations, known for their commitment to freedom, democracy, economic prowess, and technological innovation, must come together in a stronger bond than ever before.

In this context, the strong alliance of the three nations, South Korea, the U.S., and Japan stands out prominently. In August 2023, the leaders of South Korea, the United States, and Japan gathered at the historic site of Camp David to engage in discussions aimed at fostering this alliance.

The Camp David Summit involving South Korea, the United States, and Japan is being scrutinized for its pivotal and transformative role in instigating fundamental shifts in the geopolitical dynamics of Asia.

While past trilateral summits served as occasions for international multilateral conferences, this meeting stands as a



South Korea, US, and Japan Hold a Joint Press Conference
Source: Yonhap News



South Korea-U.S.-Japan Summit on August 18, 2023

Discuss ways to strengthen cooperation and deterrence against North Korea, including security, economy, and global agendas

Camp David

The site of history where important diplomatic agreements have been reached as the official resort of the President of the United States

Site: Approximately 730,000m²

Facilities: Recreation facilities such as trails, golf practice courts, tennis courts, swimming pools, bowling alleys, horseback riding grounds, movie theaters, offices, conference rooms, accommodations, etc.

The Camp David ROK-U.S.-Japan
Trilateral Summit
Source: Yonhap News

groundbreaking event, representing the inaugural gathering of South Korea, the United States, and Japan in a summit format.

During this summit, the three nations declared their commitment to advance an international order founded on common principles of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, with a primary emphasis on guaranteeing regional security and prosperity. The key conclusions of the summit are as follows:

- Instituting extensive collaborative measures among the three nations to embody the 'Spirit of Camp David' (joint statement) as a symbol of joint solidarity.
- Codifying principles for future trilateral cooperation and diplomacy as the 'Camp David Principles.'
- Committing to express political determination through swift consultations, information exchange, message coordination, and coordinated responses to regional challenges, provocations, and threats, as outlined in the 'Commitment to Consult.'

The triple binding mechanism through spirit, principles, and commitments underscores the strengthened collaboration among the three nations as well as demonstrate the emphasis among democratic nations to unite and pledge values similar to the NATO alliance in Europe. Simultaneously, the triple commitment demonstrates this determination to lead global order beyond the Indo-Pacific region. The current agreement can be considered as a significant transformation since the establishment of the South Korea-U.S. alliance in 1951 and the U.S.-Japan alliance in 1953, marking 70 years since the birth of the current Northeast Asian security framework.

2. Essence of the Camp David Principles

The Trilateral Partnership and a Shared Vision

In a reaffirmation of their collaborative efforts, the three nations solidified their partnership and a shared vision, committing to uphold the principles outlined below. These guiding principles aim to foster common values, mutual respect, and prosperity

not only among the three nations but also across the broader regional and global context.

Indo-Pacific Advancement

In alignment with international law, shared norms, and common values, the three nations will continue to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific. The three nations strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.

Regional Peace

The purpose of security cooperation is to further promote and strengthen the regional peace and stability.

Denuclearization of North Korea

The commitment to North Korea's complete denuclearization, as outlined in UN Security Council resolutions, will be upheld, along with the stance of engaging in dialogue without preconditions.

Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues

Efforts will be made to address human rights and humanitarian issues, including the immediate resolution of the issues of abductees, detainees, and unrepatriated prisoners of war.

Freedom, Peace, and Unification of North Korea

Three nations support a unified Korean Peninsula that is free and at peace.

UN Charter Principles

Adhering to the principles of the UN Charter, the three countries will responsibly fulfill their roles as global actors.

Global Issues

To resolve global issues and address the root causes of instability and unrest, cooperation in development and humanitarian responses will be strengthened.



The Camp David ROK-U.S.-Japan
Trilateral Summit
Source: Yonhap News

3. Essence of the Spirit of Camp David



Spirit of Camp David

- Creating a concrete consultative body with a common vision
- Extended deterrence and joint training, economic cooperation, economic security

Spirit of Camp David
Source: JoongAng Ilbo

a. Inauguration of a New Era

The three nations commit to broadening collaboration beyond their individual regions and strengthening of cooperation to unprecedented levels.

This includes a focus on economic growth, revitalizing prosperity, upholding the rule of law, fostering a free and open international order, advancing regional and global peace and security, promoting democracy, and safeguarding human rights.

To solidify consistent and timely communication among the three nations, plans have been unveiled to enhance communication mechanisms, involving the national-level summit. The following initiatives outline a commitment to foster more effective and streamlined channels of communication between these nations.

Annual Summit Meetings

Regular annual summit meetings involving the heads of state, foreign ministers, defense ministers, and national security advisors will be conducted, complementing existing trilateral meetings.

Ministerial Meetings

The first trilateral finance ministers' meeting will be convened, initiating discussions between industry and commerce ministers on an annual basis.

Indo-Pacific Dialogue

A pivotal initiative is set to unfold with the launch of the annual Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue, aimed at identifying new areas for common action.

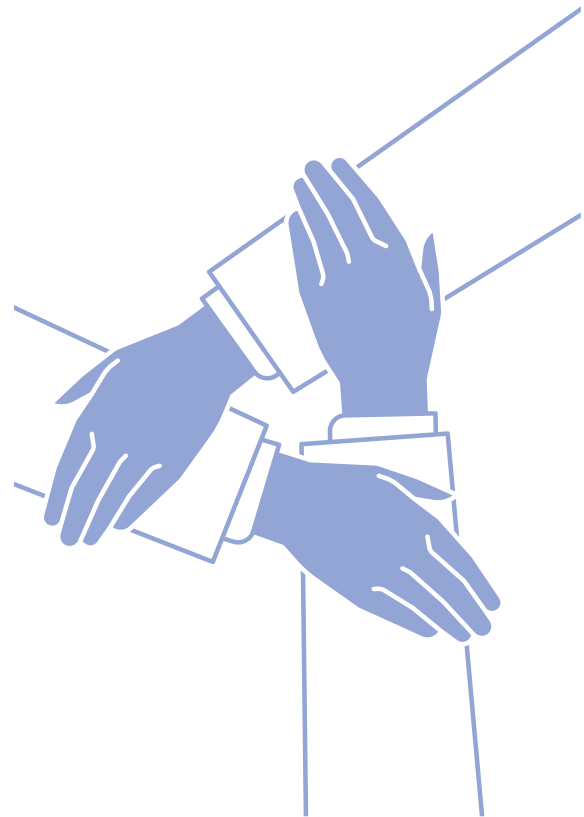
b. A free and Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Complete Denuclearization of North Korea

In terms of a free and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, the joint statement reaffirmed the commitment to achieve North Korea's complete denuclearization. South Korea, the United States, and Japan urged North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile programs, particularly emphasizing the threat they pose to peace and security in the region.

The joint statement strongly condemned North Korea's unprecedented ballistic missile launches, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and conventional military actions. The three nations agreed to enhance intelligence-sharing on North Korean missile detection and tracking and to conduct joint exercises to address nuclear and missile threats. In addition, concerns were expressed regarding North Korea's illicit cyber activities, which are being used as a source of funding for its unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs.

To address this issue and prevent North Korea's evasion of sanctions through cyber operations, the establishment of a new working group of three nations has been announced to promote cooperation, including international collaboration, in order to respond to North Korea's cyber threats and block their cyber activities.

Alongside this, the three nations reaffirmed their stance to resume unconditional dialogue with North Korea, emphasizing their joint commitment to enhancing cooperation for the promotion of human rights within North Korea, and the immediate resolution of issues concerning abductees, detainees, and unreturned prisoners of war. In addition, they expressed support for the goal of South Korea's 'Audacious Initiative', endorsing a vision for a unified Korean Peninsula that is free and at peace.



4. Essence of Commitment to Consult

South Korea, the United States, and Japan have pledged to swiftly consult with each other in order to coordinate their responses to challenges, provocations, and threats that affect their collective interests and security.

Consequently, the three nations have agreed to implement measures such as information sharing, message alignment, and coordinated response actions. This commitment does not override or infringe on existing treaties with South Korea and Japan, and doesn't confer any legal rights or obligations.



Commitment to Consult
Source: Yonhap News

Chapter 3

North Korean Human Rights Issues and the Camp David Summit

To lay the foundation for South Korea-led peaceful reunification, the foremost action is to address the issue of North Korean human rights. The Camp David principles explicitly endorse this stance by recognizing North Korean human rights issues as a shared challenge among the three countries. Chapter 3 will delve into the significance of the Camp David Summit in the resolution of North Korean human rights issues.

1. Cooperation on Addressing Human Rights Oppression in North Korea and the Camp David Summit

a. Declaration of the Common Task of South Korea, the United States, and Japan on North Korean Human Rights Issues

The ongoing severity of North Korean human rights abuses underscores the significance of the Camp David Summit in addressing these issues.

Among the various principles agreed upon at Camp David, the notable issues related to North Korean human rights include 1) support for a free and peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula and 2) resolution of human rights and humanitarian issues related to abductees, detainees, and unreturned POWs.

The inclusion of issues related to abductees and North Korean human rights in the Camp David principles is particularly notable. This has been made possible because the three nations – South Korea, the United States, and Japan – are value allies, sharing important values such as liberal democracy, market economy systems, and the promotion of human rights.

The common understanding among the three countries regarding important values that advocate and ensure individual creativity and human rights will ultimately lead them to work together for the spread of these shared values.



First Lady Kim Keon-hee and Mother of Otto Warmbier (April 2023)
Source: Office of the President, Republic of Korea

In essence, the Camp David principles represent a declarative commitment to collectively address the North Korean human rights issue.

Moreover, the call of the Camp David principles for unprecedented trilateral cooperation on North Korean human rights marks a historic starting point for the fundamental resolution of these issues.

Deportation of North Korean Fishermen



b. Promotion of One Voice on North Korean Human Rights Issues by the Three Nations

The Camp David principles mark a pivotal moment in addressing North Korean human rights issues, considering the historical tendency of the South Korean government to exhibit polarized policy orientations towards North Korean human rights, depending on the government's political inclination.

Indeed, the previous Moon Jae-in administration faced criticism for not only abstaining from co-sponsoring the North Korean human rights resolution at the UN Human Rights Council, but also for delaying the launch of the legally established North Korean Human Rights Foundation without clear reasons. Furthermore, it has been criticized for turning a blind eye to North Korean human rights issues, such as the forced repatriation of defector fishermen to North Korea without proper investigation, while being overly concerned with North Korea's reactions.

However, the Camp David principles have provided an opportunity for South Korea, the United States, and Japan to speak with one voice on the resolution of North Korean human rights issues, in addition to the active interest of the United States and Japan in this matter. This united demand is expected to exert significant pressure on North Korea. Moreover, the commitment to trilateral cooperation established by the Camp David principles provides a mechanism that can endure even if governments with different inclinations come into power, ensuring a steadfast stance on addressing North Korean human rights.

2. Mainstreaming Strategy for North Korean Human Rights Issues

a. The Necessity of Mainstreaming North Korean Human Rights Issues

In discussing the achievements and significance of the Camp David Summit, some have pointed out that North Korean human rights issues are either excluded or mentioned incidentally. It is true that the issue of North Korean human rights was given less weight compared to traditional military and security issues.

Therefore, there is a strong need to employ a “mainstreaming” strategy to elevate the importance of human rights issues. In July 2023, Minister of Unification Kwon Young-se underscored the significance of enhancing North Korean human rights, asserting that the Yoon Suk-yeol government regards this matter with equal importance to the North Korean nuclear issue. This statement reflects the significance of “mainstreaming.”

Up until now, the cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan has primarily focused on regional security from a military perspective. However, it is crucial to strengthen cooperation not only in the military aspect but also in a more comprehensive perspective that includes collaboration in the field of North Korean human rights. In other words, enhancing international cooperation on North Korean human rights issues would be an appropriate starting point.

b. Understanding the Interconnection between the North Korean Nuclear Issue and North Korean Human Rights Issues

There is a consensus within the international community that issues related to North Korean nuclear development and human rights must be addressed in conjunction. The international community clearly recognizes that behind North Korea’s military adventurism, such as its pursuit of nuclear development, lies the oppression and exploitation of North Korean residents’ freedom and labor rights as a means to fund these endeavors.

Julie Turner, the U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human



Former Minister of Unification (July 2023) emphasized improvement of North Korean human rights
Source: Yonhap News



Ambassadors for Human Rights from South Korea and the U.S. emphasizing the connection between North Korea’s nuclear weapons and human rights issues (October 2023)
Source: Yonhap News



U.N. Security Council discussed North Korea's human rights issue for the first time in six years
Source: Yonhap News (August 2023)

Rights, has expressed empathy with this perspective, stating, “The continued deterioration of human rights in North Korea is linked to nuclear development, and North Korea relies on forced labor and exploitation to generate revenue for the development of unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles.”

c. Promoting International Cooperation for the Mainstreaming of North Korean Human Rights Issues

The United States is currently playing a leading role in highlighting North Korean human rights issues in the international community. The fact that these issues were openly discussed at the UN Security Council for the first time in six years is also a result of the U.S. influence. However, China's direct influence on North Korea should not be overlooked.

China and Russia share a mutual vulnerability with North Korea when it comes to issues of human rights. As a result, both China and Russia are likely to downplay the seriousness of North Korean human rights issues on the international stage, including at the UN, arguing that it infringes upon the sovereignty of North Korea. This situation could lead to new security threats among major powers, creating conflicts not only in traditional military security but also in the sphere of human rights.

Therefore, there is a growing need to mainstream North Korean human rights issues and expand solidarity with countries that share similar values with South Korea, the United States, and Japan on international platforms like the UN. To accomplish this, the tripartite alliance of democratic nations – South Korea, the United States, and Japan – must accurately understand the human rights situation in North Korea and establish strategies on an international scale to garner widespread agreement for improving the situation.

Coincidentally, the three nations have affirmed and declared in the Camp David Principles their shared values of democracy, a market economy system, and the spread of human rights. Based on these, the three nations should continue their efforts to lead international cooperation.

3. Virtuous Circle of Human Rights, Spread of Liberal Democracy, and Peaceful Unification

Some argue that the Yoon Seok-yeol administration's emphasis on North Korean human rights could impede discussions on reunification. Yet, this assertion merely concedes a failure to accurately acknowledge the fundamental premise of reunification. The unification of the Korean Peninsula necessitates realization through freedom and peace, guided by the leadership of the Republic of Korea. In addressing freedom and peace, confronting the North Korean human rights issue is an inevitable facet.

Disseminating human rights and liberal democratic values in North Korea stands as a crucial responsibility for the international community, inclusive of South Korea, the United States, and Japan, united by these shared principles. These endeavors present an opportunity to introduce trends of democratization within North Korea, fostering internal transformation. Pursuing these shifts within North Korea is anticipated to alleviate military tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and contribute to regional economic development by enhancing security conditions.

In the joint promotion of the Indo-Pacific strategy, South Korea, the United States, and Japan must persist in their collaboration as partners, playing a pivotal role in the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The formal endorsement of free and peaceful reunification led by South Korea, by the United States and Japan at Camp David, holds significant importance. It signifies the completion of the initial phase of the journey towards reunification, under the leadership of South Korea, as a collaborative effort among the three nations to address human rights abuses in North Korea and achieve the definitive solution to the North Korean human rights issues.



The Yoon Suk-yeol administration has publicly issued a report on North Korean human rights for the first time
Source: Office of the President, Republic of Korea

4. Conclusion

The severity of North Korea's human rights abuses and its nuclear development remain a threat to international security, even at this very moment. Amidst this deadlock of critical issues, the Camp David Summit of South Korea, the United States, and Japan was convened, buoyed by a dramatic improvement in relations between South Korea and Japan.

At the Camp David Summit, the three countries established an unprecedentedly robust cooperative framework as nations sharing the values of liberal democracy. This provided a solid foundation for publicizing North Korean human rights issues as a critical topic in the international community and for cooperating towards a peaceful unification led by South Korea.

The Camp David Summit, therefore, carries two implications from the perspective of resolving North Korean human rights issues. First, in the short term, it made a clear commitment to strengthening cooperation with other countries and like-minded nations within the international community to exert pressure on North Korea's human rights. Second, in the long term, it can be seen as laying the groundwork for the will and foundation of trilateral cooperation towards the best solution for fundamentally resolving North Korean human rights issues: the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula.

If discussions on North Korean human rights are expanded at the next trilateral summit, it could further highlight the issue in the international community. The Camp David Summit can be evaluated as a breakthrough in resolving North Korean human rights issues, as it has provided effective and powerful means to put pressure on North Korea.



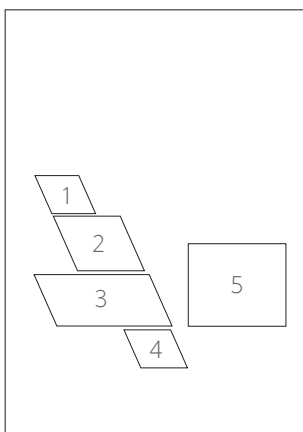


S.Korea-U.S.-Japan summit at Camp David
Source: Yonhap News



Luncheon for the leaders of ROK, U.S., and Japan at Camp David
Source: Office of the President, Republic of Korea

North Korean Human Rights Issues and the Camp David Summit



COVER PHOTOGRAPH SOURCE

1 AP / 2 PSCORE / 3 AFP / 4 Human Rights Now / 5 Office of the President, Republic of Korea