

Is the Republic of Korea "the Enemy"?

We released a "statement" and are now seeking sign-ons in Japan.

This statement was prepared by volunteers who are concerned about the recent deterioration of the relationship between Japan and the Republic of Korea and want to seek support for their view from Japanese citizens through the Internet. 78 sponsors are the first signers. There are some differences of opinion among us, but we agree on the fundamentals.

Currently, the relationship between Japan and the Republic of Korea has fallen into a vicious cycle. We must stop this vicious cycle immediately, take a deep breath, cool off, and regain our calm. In principle, it is often the case that conflicts and disputes are caused by mistakes on both sides. This time too, we believe both the Japanese and the Republic of Korea governments are problematic. However, since we are Japanese citizens, we would first like to point out problems with the Japanese government, for which we are responsible. Problems with the the Republic of Korea government will be raised by the Republic of Korea citizens.

Conversations will be generated by the self-criticism of both sides. And it is this conversation that holds the potential to generate peace and prosperity for the region.

Organizers of the "Statement: Is the Republic of Korea 'the Enemy'?"

July 25, 2019

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<Statement> Is the Republic of Korea “ the Enemy”?

Introduction

We are opposed to the export restrictions against the Republic of Korea, which were announced by the Japanese government at the beginning of July, and demand their immediate lifting. Given the fact that semiconductor manufacturing has significance for the economy of the Republic of Korea, it is obvious that this measure is a hostile act, which could cause grave damage to the economy of the Republic of Korea.

Initially, when the measure was issued by the Japanese government, it was interpreted as retaliation in response to the court decision over the "conscripted workers" issue and how the Republic of Korea Government handled this issue thereafter, last year. However, when criticism arose that it was against the principles of free trade, the Japanese government started to claim that this measure was taken because the trustworthiness regarding national security had been lost. President Moon Jae-in took strong exception to this on July 15th saying, “It is a grave challenge to our government, which has... making utmost effort to develop inter-Korean ties and peace...”

1. Is the Republic of Korea "the enemy"?

Sometimes, conflict happens between countries and disadvantageous measures are taken. However, if a countermeasure is taken, just because a country doesn't like the measures taken by the other country, this can backfire, provoke the other country, and have an effect opposite to the one intended.

In the case of Japan and the Republic of Korea, who share a unique historical past, particularly cautious consideration is necessary even during a time of confrontation. This is because Japan once invaded Korea and colonized it. Any administration that is seen as having "submitted" to Japanese pressure will be dismissed by the people. If Japanese retaliation invites the Republic of Korea retaliation, the result of the chain reaction is a hopeless mess. Nationalism in both countries may get out of hand for a while. We absolutely must avoid falling into such a situation.

As many have pointed out, the measures taken this time, themselves contravene the principles of free trade, from which Japan has greatly benefited, and they will have a negative impact on the Japanese economy. Coincidentally, 2020 is the year of the "Tokyo Olympics/Para-lympics." Normally, the host country would want to avoid any dispute with the surrounding countries. So, why is the host country itself causing a conflict with a nearby country?

These measures will only complicate the relationship between the two countries, and Japan will end up gaining nothing. There can be no other way to resolve the problem than through calm and rational discussions, not emotion.

It may be a good idea to remind people that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe talked about improving relations with China and Russia in his administrative policy speech at the first Diet deliberations this year, and even about North Korea, he stated that he would like to "break the crust of mutual distrust," "directly come face to face with Chairman Kim Jong-un by myself," "without missing any chances" and conduct negotiations. In contrast, he didn't mention a word about the relationship with the Republic of Korea. It actually appeared as if he was assuming a posture of "ignoring" the Republic of Korea. Then, during the G20 summit in Osaka at the end of June, he had private meetings with the leaders of almost all participating countries, but completely ignored President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea, not even engaging him in a brief chat. Then he tops it all off with these measures.

These measures treat the Republic of Korea as if they are our "enemy," but this is a tremendous mistake. The Republic of Korea is a country based on the principles of freedom and democracy, and is an important neighbor for us. This neighbor will work with Japan to establish peace and prosperity in East Asia.

2. Japan and the Republic of Korea are future-minded partners

In October 1998, the President of the Republic of Korea, Kim Dae-jung visited Japan. He praised Japan in a speech at the National Diet (Japan's legislature), recognizing that under its parliamentary democracy, post-war Japan had achieved economic growth, provided aid to Asia, and at the same time, maintained its pacifism. He called on the Japanese people to have courage to face the past and have a sense of awe for history. He called on the people of the Republic of Korea to give due recognition to Japan, which had gone through great changes since the end of the War, and he encouraged Japanese and Koreans to walk together towards the future. It should be noted that Japanese lawmakers responded to President Kim Dae-jung's speech with a big applause. Japanese politicians and others, who grew up in the midst of the Post-war Democracy, supported and saved Kim Dae-jung, who was almost killed multiple times during the military regime. Many Japanese were aware that Kim Dae-jung had stood firm in his beliefs despite the oppression by the military regime and that he had fought for democracy. This mutual respect became the basis for the "Japan-the Republic of Korea Joint Declaration of 1998" that was made by Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo and President Kim Dae-jung.

President Kim Dae-jung stated his great hope that despite strong doubt and distrust of Japan by the Korean people, as long as Japan faces its pre-war history, and advances toward the future while upholding the post-war Constitution and democracy, both countries can advance together towards the future. And he also opened the door to Japanese mass culture, which had been banned in the Republic of Korea until then.

3. The Treaty on Basic Relations and the Claims Agreement of 1965 have not solved the problem

The Abe administration has repeatedly stressed that the wartime worker issue goes against international law and international agreements. This refers to the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (the “Treaty on Basic Relations”) and the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea (i.e., the “Claims Agreement”) both signed in 1965.

Article 2 of the Treaty on Basic Relations declares that the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty of 1910 is “already null and void”, but the Republic of Korea and Japan continue to have conflicting interpretations of this Article 2. According to the Korean interpretation, the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was, from the start, essentially invalid, and Japan’s colonization of Korea was not based on Korea’s consent, but was forced upon the Korean people. On the other hand, according to the Japanese interpretation, the Annexation Treaty was valid up to the founding of the Republic of Korea in 1948, and the annexation of Korea by Japan occurred under an agreement between both countries. Therefore, Japan does not intend to reflect on its past or offer an apology for its colonialism.

Nonetheless, it has been a half century since then, and both the Japanese government and people have changed. A majority of the Japanese people share the common view that we should recognize, apologize for, and reflect upon how our colonialism caused damage and inflicted suffering on the Korean people. The historical perspective in Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's remarks in 1995 was the basis for the "Japan-the Republic of Korea Joint Declaration of 1998" and the "Japan-Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Pyongyang Declaration of 2002." If, equipped with such an understanding, the Japanese government can face the Republic of Korea, while also incorporating President Kan Naoto's remarks at the 100th Anniversary of the Korean Annexation in 2010, then we should be able to cooperate and find solutions to problems that emerge.

The conscripted worker lawsuit in question is a civil complaint and the defendants are Japanese firms. The defendant corporations' response to the decision should be called into question first, but the Japanese government's intervention has caused confusion and this has developed into a dispute between the two countries. In the cases of forceful recruitment/forced labor of Chinese, there have been settlements made with Hanaoka (Kajima Corporation) in 2000, with Nishimatsu Construction in 2009, and with Mitsubishi Materials in 2016, even after the Chinese government waived the wartime reparations with the Sino-Japanese Joint Statement in 1972. And at those times, the Japanese government never intervened. They said that these are matters between private entities.

The Treaty on Basic Relations and the Claims Agreement serve as the foundation for relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, and they should be upheld. The issues between Japan and Korea, however, are not "finally solved", as the Abe administration has repeatedly claimed. This is their stock line. The Japanese government has not denied the rights of individuals to claim compensation in a consistent manner. During the last half century, the Japanese government has improvised measures that are alternatives to compensation for personal damages caused by colonization, such as supporting Koreans who were left in Sakhalin to return home, and supporting Korean nuclear bomb victims. (Although it has been viewed in various ways and the foundation has already been dissolved), the "Japan-the Republic of Korea Comfort Women Deal," which was signed by the Abe administration and the Park Geun-hye administration in 2015, is a case in which the Japanese government offered, through the Republic of Korea foundation, 1 billion yen to victims—this sum to be taken from Japan's national budget. The Republic of Korea, too, has provided redress to individual victims of colonization, during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, by enacting a law. Given these precedents, we think that through discussion and debate the two governments can find some middle ground where the two countries can come to an agreement.

Currently there is a "confrontation" regarding the establishment of an arbitration committee. The first time a solution through an arbitration committee from Article 3 of the Claims Agreement came into the spotlight was with the decision made by the Constitutional Court of Korea regarding the "comfort women issue" in August 2011. Back then, Japan did not go along with the establishment of an arbitration committee. Given this past, it is now demanded that the Japanese government handle this issue in a sincere way so that a solution to the conflict is found.

Conclusion

We demand that the Japanese government immediately retract the export restrictions against the Republic of Korea, and commence a calm dialogue and debate with the the Republic of Korea government.

Cultural and citizen-level exchanges between Japan and the Republic of Korea opened as part of the "Japan-the Republic of Korea Joint Declaration of 1998," have reached an enormous scale. The popularity of BTS (Bangtan Boys) and other K-POP groups is overwhelming. In a TV interview, a Japanese school girl openly commented that "we, high school girls live through the Republic of Korea." In the last year three million people travel from Japan to the Republic of Korea, and seven million people visit Japan from Korea. No matter how much far rightists on the Internet and producers of hate speech yell, Japan and the Republic of Korea are important neighbors, and the Republic of Korea and Japan are inseparable.

Prime Minister Abe, please stop driving a wedge between the Japanese people and the Republic of Korea people, and embroiling the people of the two countries in contestation. Even if we have different opinions, should we not just continue our discussion while holding hands together?

July 25, 2019

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<Sponsors> (* Organizer) A total of 78 people as of July 29, 2019

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