

Address by His Excellency Lee Jae Myung
President of the Republic of Korea
General Debate
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(Check against delivery)

I would like to express my respect and gratitude to all Members of the United Nations and staff of the UN Secretariat for their contribution to world peace and shared prosperity.

I extend my sincere congratulations to Her Excellency Annalena Baerbock on assuming the Presidency of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly. I also pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for his unwavering dedication and hard work.

I hope the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly will achieve even more meaningful results under their outstanding leadership.

Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, and distinguished delegates,

This year is a meaningful year marking the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

The past 80 years of the UN have been a valuable journey of protecting the dignity and values of humanity and seeking a path forward for future

generations.

If someone asks what the UN has achieved, I would confidently reply, “Look at the 80-year history of the Republic of Korea.”

It is no exaggeration to say that the Republic of Korea’s history, dotted with challenges and responses, is the history of the United Nations, which has constantly confronted enormous challenges facing humanity.

Liberated from colonial rule the very year that the United Nations was founded, the Republic of Korea emerged from the scars of division and ashes of war through UN assistance, maintaining national identity while achieving industrialization and blooming into a democracy.

Therefore, the Republic of Korea, in itself, is a country that has proven the value of the UN’s existence.

Whenever the Republic of Korea revived the hopes of lives as precious as the weight of the universe amidst horrific wars and disasters, the UN flag fluttered at the center of that intense solidarity.

The United Nations has strived to provide equal rights and opportunities to everyone without discrimination and has provided education and vaccines to make children’s lives blossom.

This small country in the East, which rose with the support of the UN and the international community, has become a proud UN Member that is drawing the

world's attention. It is raising its role and responsibility as a member of the international community more rapidly than any other country.

There were times when democracy and peace were in crisis, but each time, the Republic of Korea rose with indomitable strength.

Even a self-coup could not break the people of the Republic of Korea's strong will desiring democracy and peace.

“The Revolution of Light” that the people of the Republic of Korea achieved against the darkness of the insurrection last winter was a historic moment that demonstrated the brilliant achievement of the UN spirit.

The remarkable resilience and strength of democracy that the Republic of Korea has shown will be ours as well as that of the entire world.

“I need you to take my hand and guide me away from all this. Away to where the light shines through, to where the flowers bloom.”

As the novelist Han Kang, laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, wrote, the Republic of Korea will be a milestone of light for all who join the journey toward democracy.

Today, at the UN General Assembly, where world peace and humanity's shared prosperity is discussed, I proudly announce that a new Republic of Korea, which will be a beacon of light for global citizens, has completely returned to the international community.

The Republic of Korea, which has grown thanks to the support and assistance of the UN, will not hesitate to take on the role of a leading nation, generously sharing its experience and history of restoring democracy.

Despite ceaseless efforts from all corners of the world, the international community's determination and aspiration to maintain international peace and security 80 years ago still remains an unfinished task for everyone.

280 million people are still in a state of extreme hunger. Armed conflicts around the world, including in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as the climate crisis, which has already become a real problem, threaten the survival of humanity.

The answer lies in the wisdom of the pioneers who founded the United Nations, as well as the path that the people of the Republic of Korea demonstrated. There is only one way: "more democracy."

"The People-Centered Government" of the Republic of Korea, through the power of collective intelligence, is ceaselessly attempting innovations seeking better alternatives in democracy.

The way to solve common challenges facing the international community is no different. When all the countries experiencing the same problems gather here at the United Nations and continue multilateral cooperation putting their heads together, we will all be able to move toward a bright future of peace and prosperity.

I look forward to the "UN80 Initiative," presented by the Secretary-General,

taking root as a vision that achieves UN's evolution and advancement in line with the demands of our time.

I also hope the UN Security Council can increase the number of seats of non-permanent members, reflecting changes in the international environment, and enhance its effectiveness and representation.

As a member of the UN Security Council for the term 2024-2025, the Republic of Korea is making efforts so that the UN Security Council can respond proactively to threats to the international peace and security.

Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, and distinguished delegates,

The Republic of Korea, having restored democracy, dreams of a better future.

The Republic of Korea will fulfill its responsibility as a responsible global power that steadfastly upholds the values of freedom, human rights, inclusiveness and solidarity championed by the United Nations.

We will further develop our institutions and culture so that everyone residing in the Republic of Korea, both nationals and foreigners, can be respected as an equal member of society in all fields of life.

The Republic of Korea will strengthen and lead cooperation with the international community while realizing the value of respect for human rights.

In a time of crisis where immediate survival is urgent, words like solidarity, coexistence and cooperation may feel somewhat distant.

However, humanity has always dreamed of hopes as high as its deep despair and has achieved the progress we see today through a passion for a “better tomorrow.”

The more difficult the times are, the more we must return to the basic spirit of the UN, which is trust in universal values of humankind.

Just as the determination to not pass down the devastation of wars led to the founding of the UN and has prevented conflicts and preserved peace, we, today, must cooperate more, trust more, and join hands more firmly in order to build a better world for future generations.

Democratic Korea will lead the way in multilateral cooperation toward a sustainable future.

Peace is a value that is more important than anything else. In the Republic of Korea as well as everywhere in the world, peace is the basic foundation for democracy and economic development.

The disputes and conflicts we are currently facing vividly show how easily the ideals of human dignity and sustainable development can crumble without peace.

Today, the Republic of Korea is fulfilling its responsibility as a key contributor to the United Nation’s peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities.

Our brave soldiers who have steadfastly defended the Republic of Korea, a divided nation, are helping to pave the way toward sustainable peace led by the UN.

Threats to peace are not only physical elements. In an era where artificial intelligence (AI) technology is critical to security capabilities and cyberattacks threaten national security, we must confront not only “visible enemies,” but also “invisible enemies.”

If we passively let ourselves be dragged along by the changes of the AI era, we will meet a dystopia of deepening polarization and inequality, unable to shake off the dark shadows of human rights abuses caused by the misuse of technology.

However, if we proactively respond to these changes, we can use the high productivity as a driving force to build a foundation for innovation and prosperity, and create a useful base for strengthening direct democracy.

I hope the Open Debate that I will preside over as UN Security Council President tomorrow will significantly contribute to the international community’s efforts to promote the responsible use of AI.

Furthermore, we intend to share our vision for the future of AI through the “APEC AI Initiative” at the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting, which will be held in Gyeongju, Korea, next month.

We will strive to ensure that the vision of “AI for all,” where advances in

cutting-edge technology contribute to the universal values of humanity, becomes the “new normal” for the international community.

AI-driven technological innovations will be an important new tool for solving global challenges like the climate crisis.

Over the past 80 years, the United Nations has paved the way for sustainable development and spearheaded efforts to address climate crisis threatening the survival of humanity. Nations around the world must respond to these efforts.

The Republic of Korea is pursuing a “great energy transition,” leveraging science and technology and digital innovation to increase energy efficiency and expand the share of renewable energy.

We will submit a responsible nationally determined contribution within this year, joining the united will of the international community.

At the “4th UN Ocean Conference” that will be co-hosted by the Republic of Korea and Chile in 2028, we will also work to build substantive solidarity for the sustainable development of oceans.

Such efforts by the Republic of Korea to actively address global challenges are based on a firm commitment to fulfilling humanity’s shared promise of sustainable development.

Since the United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 10 years ago, the international community has made much progress in eradicating poverty and reducing inequality.

However, the demand for development financing is continuously increasing, and the most vulnerable are still suffering.

Let us squarely face this grave reality and create new momentum for change. We must move toward structurally reforming global development governance while enhancing the quality of financial resources.

I trust that we will pull together in order to bring about more cases like the Republic of Korea, growing and developing from an aid recipient country to an aid donor country.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations as well as the 80th anniversary of the division of the Korean Peninsula. New challenges as well as unresolved tasks await us.

Democratic Korea will begin a new journey toward peaceful coexistence and shared growth on the Korean Peninsula.

The first step will be to restore broken inter-Korean trust and shift to a stance of mutual respect.

The Government of the Republic of Korea clearly reaffirms that it respects the North's current system, that it will not pursue any form of unification by absorption, and that it has no intention of engaging in hostile acts.

Based on these three principles, we intend to end the vicious cycle of

unnecessary inter-Korean military tension and hostile acts.

That is the reason why we have proactively taken measures including halting the launch of leaflets and suspending broadcasts toward the North.

Going forward, the Government of the Republic of Korea will consistently seek a path to reduce military tensions and restore inter-Korean trust

The most certain peace is a state where there is no need to fight.

Through comprehensive dialogue centered on “Exchange,” “Normalization,” and “Denuclearization,” in other words, “END,” we must end the era of hostility and confrontation on the Korean Peninsula and usher in a new era of peaceful coexistence and shared growth.

The fact that exchanges and cooperation are a shortcut to peace is a timeless lesson demonstrated by the history of fraught inter-Korean relations.

By gradually expanding inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, we will pave the way for sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

It is crucial for both the ROK and the DPRK, as well as the international community to work together to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula.

While striving to advance inter-Korean relations, we will provide our active support and cooperation for efforts to normalize relations with the international community including between the United States and the DPRK.

Denuclearization is undoubtedly a grave task, but it is time to seek realistic and rational solutions based on a cool-headed perception that denuclearization cannot be achieved in the short term.

The international community must gather its wisdom in a pragmatic and phased solution beginning with a “stop” in the sophistication of nuclear and missile capabilities, going through a “reduction” process and reaching “dismantlement.”

Realizing lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula would present new hope and possibility to humanity suffering from conflict.

The Republic of Korea will end the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula through the “E.N.D. Initiative” and fulfill its responsibility and role to contribute to world peace and prosperity.

A future where people from different nations cooperate and overcome global challenges together may sound like a rosy, dream-like vision.

However, this is by no means an impossible dream.

Peace is not merely the absence of armed conflict, but the realization of a community where differences are respected and people coexist.

As long as respect and aspiration for diversity is inside us, we can always unite and embrace one another.

K-culture is connecting people all over the world beyond borders, language and

cultural differences.

The success and spread of K-culture prove that universal empathy is possible, transcending differences in all backgrounds.

Gathering the energy of solidarity, coexistence and consideration, the Republic of Korea, having ushered in a new democratic republic, is ready to move toward a sustainable future and a new page in human history.

Though a difficult journey is expected, humanity has been able to grow and come this far by not giving up on challenges even in the face of adversity.

As the people of the Republic of Korea raised colorful cheering sticks in the face of a crisis in democracy, I call on the international community and the United Nations to lift the lantern of hope that will light the future of humanity.

The Republic of Korea will boldly lead the way toward a new era of “peaceful coexistence and shared growth” on the Korean Peninsula, toward a “better future together.”

Thank you for your attention.