

2019 Seoul Peace Conference: Peace Beyond the Walls

Keynote speech

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stand here I bow to the memory of all Koreans who lost their lives in the fight for independence against foreign rulers, and for democracy and freedom against dictatorship. I bow to the memory of the late President Kim Dae Jung, a man of vision, principles and convictions, a fighter for human rights and democracy, a bridge builder with the North.

KDJ was a personal friend and friend of my country. In September 1999, working closely with President Bill Clinton and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President KDJ dispatched a peace-keeping battalion to my country contributing to end the violence there. I commend the Korean armed forces for their professionalism and bravery in the service of the UN in my country and I bow to the memory of five Korean soldiers who died while on duty as part of the UN Peacekeeping Forces in Timor-Leste between 1999 and 2002.

I am very proud to have nominated KDJ for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999. He was awarded the Prize in 2000. I wrote the submission nominating KDJ for the Nobel Peace Prize in a hotel room in Seoul. I was pleased and honored to have attended the great Oslo ceremony on 10th December 2000 as President KDJ's personal guest.

It is a privilege to be back in ROK. I have visited countless times over the past two decades and this is my third visit this year. I dare say I am reasonably familiar with the country's history, its extremely rich 5,000 year old civilization, the wars and defeats the brave Korean people have endured and the victories they celebrated. I know about the past of suffering, barely surviving in extreme poverty and living in humiliation.

Land and history shape us as a people, mold our particular personality and attitudes; as human beings we are compelled to adapt to every circumstance in order to survive and thrive even in the midst of extreme adversity. This process of adaptation shapes us, make us who we are.

And you, my brothers and sisters of this Korean land, you are a very proud, resilient, hardworking and determined people who transformed your country from extreme poverty into a robust, vibrant world economy, from colonial occupation and military dictatorship into an uncompromising democracy.

Our countries, RDTL and ROK, share strong common historical experiences. We know firsthand the tragic consequences of wars, the immense suffering caused on a whole nation. Through your long history going back to the IV Century BC you fought many wars with different Chinese emperors; in modern times you were invaded, occupied and colonized by Japan; we were colonized during almost 500 years, endured two major wars and occupation. We were invaded and occupied by Japan during World War II and later by Indonesia. Before and in between we were colonized by Portugal. We survived and prevailed through centuries of colonial rule, occupation by the Japanese Imperial Army, recolonization by Portugal, and occupation by Indonesia.

Being a small country of less than 1.5 million people, mostly young, a dynamic democracy born in 2002 with steady support from the international community, namely the United Nations, neighbors and friends around the world, we understand and value international partnership.

In victory in 2002 we celebrated our freedom. We honored our martyrs and heroes, we began to look after the veterans, widows, orphans and the war mutilated. We reconciled with our domestic adversaries, those who didn't think and believe like us; we forgave our enemies without waiting for their apology. We rejected an international tribunal to try those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Those who tortured and killed did not apologize for their crimes; they are still unable to summon courage and accept their part of guilt. But today we are at peace with ourselves, we reconciled our nation and reconciled with our neighbors, and slowly, steadily we are building a peaceful, inclusive, democratic and fair society for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

Before I turn to the conventional and unconventional global security threats to peace, I wish to draw your attention to what I believe will be the real existential threat to human kind. These threats are all interlinked, directly or indirectly feeding into each other.

I will zoom in on few points: looming increased political instability, rising intra state, inter state and regional conflicts caused by extreme poverty, food insecurity, severe malnutrition, hunger, scandalous social inequalities, corruption and ostentation, diminishing agricultural land and extreme water scarcity.

These are the other dimensions of global ethical, moral and security challenges and threats we will increasingly face; they will be our undoing in the future if we continue to lack vision and bold leadership to adopt preventive policies, strategies and financing consistent with gravity of these problems.

The Asia-Pacific Region boasts the world's most dynamic economies, outperforming all other regions, pulled primarily by the wealthy Northeast and Southeast Asian giants, resulting in truly impressive poverty reductions.

However, according to data circulated at two Asia-Pacific Water Summits, in Yangon and Tokyo, in 2017 and 2018, in which I was a keynote speaker, *“roughly 1.1 billion people in Asia alone live in areas currently experiencing severe water stress and, unless significant action is taken, the number of affected population is expected to increase by more than 40% by 2050”*.

Access to fresh water for survival is a human right. Because it is essential to life itself, it is essential to all other human rights. Water security is a key component of sustainable development. Scarcity of fresh water as a result of climate change and population pressures should compel the international community to mobilize knowledge and resources to address this humanitarian and security challenge. It is the very survival of hundreds of millions of people that we are talking about. Water crisis and food crisis pose a graver security challenge than terrorism.

Again I quote from the Yangon and Tokyo Water Security Summits: *Achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals can only happen if water is valued, if water resources are effectively protected and managed and if water security is enhanced in all the countries of the region.*

It is beyond reasonable doubt that human activity over the past 100 years is the cause of climate change; it may be politically correct and expedient to assign all the blame to the industrial powers but while there should be differentiated responsibility. We are all responsible for the enormous damage caused to our common planet and the resources in it.

Governments, civil society and private sector of the developed and developing worlds must build bridges, seek partnership and cooperation to advance our common interests, as certainly, preserving a healthy environment and securing water resources should unite us all.

Asia is the common home to half of the world's population; putting aside CO2 emissions caused by obsolete industries across Asia, on a hourly basis we extract more from Mother Earth for our

basic daily needs than peoples from other regions of the world. The environmental cost of the weight of half of humanity on Asian soil is staggering. Every day more than 4 billion people in Asia extract from Earth the most precious resource, water, as it is fast becoming a scarce commodity. Forests are disappearing at alarming rates. Add to this the industrial waste and plastic poisoning rivers, lakes and seas, the depletion of fish stocks due to unrestrained overfishing for commercial purposes. In the absence of electric or gas stoves for cooking the family meal forests are felled for fire wood. In addition we witness the unscrupulous commercial logging that have reduced forested areas throughout Asia to alarming levels.

As much as an atomic radiation or a major volcano eruption anywhere in the world inevitably affects all living beings in the immediate vicinity and beyond, weather pattern changes such as too little rain or too late rain, or too much rain or a prolonged drought, cause a chain reaction that affects all. Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries are the most exposed and vulnerable to climate change and water scarcity.

In regards financing and investment for sustainable development, poverty eradication, clean water for impoverished communities, we should be more creative in searching for strategic partnerships with the private sector that manages vast fortunes. Trillions of dollars are held by the private sector; combined with its vast pool of information, knowledge and creativity, the private sector is a vital, indispensable partner.

Civil society movements are key players; when fully involved they contribute decisively towards the canvassing of ideas and mobilization of resources necessary for the realization of the SDGs goals. It is therefore vital that every effort be made to fully engage civil society and the private sector in the global commitment to eradicate extreme poverty, malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy, and to ensure access to clean water and food security for all.

The G7+ group of fragile States from Asia, the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean, recently won official observer status with UNGA. It stemmed from Timor-Leste's rich experience in nation building, state building, reconciliation and peace building, and our strong commitment to build international partnerships, sharing our national experiences as countries in conflict, post conflict, fragility and transitioning to sustainable peace and development.

Anywhere we turn today, any day of the week, we read about violence and death, immense suffering of the innocent, of children and youth, of countries imploding violently along ethnic and religious lines. Every day we read about, and see, violence and death, immense suffering of the innocent, children and youth. A few weeks ago, an entire Palestinian family was killed by merciless Israeli retaliation against Hamas attacks. A baby survived, the only one of an entire family killed by an arrogant power, a power that claims to be the chosen people of God. World leaders cannot be proud of their failure to end the barbarities in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, counted among the deadliest conflicts raging in the world. They are by no means the only ones ravaging entire countries and peoples.

The rich and powerful continue nonchalantly to manufacture and export weapons of mass destruction and profit from the wars they fuel. Not surprisingly one industry that has not suffered the effects of the 2008-2009 economic and financial crisis is the weapons industry.

We see these weapons being indiscriminately used by States and non-States entities in the wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Mali, Central African Republic, Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Sudan, Afghanistan, etc.

In our region there is a complete catalogue of serious security risks, namely, nuclear proliferation, escalation of tensions and threats in the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea overlapping claims and militarization of this disputed area, the India-Pakistan standoff over the disputed Kashmir, China and India rivalry, the continuing wars ravaging Afghanistan, the ethnic and religious conflict in Myanmar inviting external extremists involvement, and the threat of ISIS-inspired sympathizers and militants across Asia, are just some of the serious challenges our region faces.

The cauldron of the Middle East wars and the endemic poverty plaguing much of the African Continent have uprooted more than 60 million people and of these many have sought and are seeking shelter and a new life in the old Continent, Europe.

Only a few years ago we read about "Africa on the move;" Africa's potential for growth is real and still possible. This continent of one billion people, young and increasingly educated, holds the riches of the world - from agriculture potential to valuable strategic minerals. But

powerhouses like South Africa and Nigeria are facing serious challenges to economic growth and stability, undermined by corruption and extreme inequality.

South Sudan is being torn apart by tribal warfare on a shocking scale approaching genocide; there is real risk of renewed widespread conflict in DR Congo and a new Ebola pandemic is surging in the country. There is no end in sight to the conflicts in Mali, Burundi, CAR and Nigeria.

Generations of young who survive the horrendous killing fields will grow up traumatized and angry. And where, how they will unleash their anger? Will they be easy, willing new recruits of extremist, violent groups? Will they turn to drugs and suicide? Or will they heal, become law abiding citizens, and will fully integrate in the communities and lead peaceful lives?

I pray that I will be proven wrong, but I fear that a nuclear North Korea is inevitable, irreversible. The world, in particular the current nuclear powers, should begin to get used to the idea that they will have to share this "privilege" with a new nuclear club member.

Notwithstanding the best efforts and great photo ops between President Trump and President Kim Jong Un, and despite the genuine, tireless and discrete efforts of President Moon, President Kim Jong Un and the military elite around him, conditioned and frozen in time, accustomed to decades of exercising total power and conscious that this power derives from nuclear deterrence, does not seem to seriously consider abandoning nuclear weapons plans.

I submit that when in 1974 India detonated its first nuclear bomb, with Pakistan following suit, when the powers that be at the time did little to prevent the two poor South Asian countries going nuclear, a Pandora's box was opened. The culprits of this insane state of affairs are the nuclear powers who have not shown statesmanship to deescalate nuclear arsenals and dismantle them.

President Barak Obama, a great orator, won a Nobel Peace Prize for two major speeches, one delivered in Prague where he promised to work towards nuclear disarmament and the other in Cairo where he extended a hand of friendship to Arabs and Muslims. On the promise to

deescalate the nuclear arms race Obama did exactly the opposite. He presided over the beginning of a 30-year program of modernizing the US nuclear arsenal.

I can only commend President Moon for his stated decision to pursue dialogue with the North. Soon after he took office President Moon travelled to Berlin, a highly symbolic visit, to what was for decades the divided capital of divided Germany. President Moon said then:

We need to urgently ease the military tension on the Korean Peninsula. We need to rebuild the trust that has collapsed between the South and the North. In this regard, we will seek exchanges and dialogue. North Korea also needs to stop from any more nuclear provocations. We need to establish a military management system to prevent accidental clashes.

A more fundamental solution is to uproot the North Korean nuclear issue. The North Korean nuclear issue has become much more difficult to deal with than in the past with the advancement of North Korea's nuclear arsenal. A step-by-step and comprehensive approach is required.

My government, in cooperation with the international community, will work towards a comprehensive solution of the current issues on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, including the complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program and establishing a peace regime, easing North Korea's security and economic concerns, and improving North Korea-US and North Korea-Japan relations.

President Moon's key words:

...easing North Korea's security and economic concerns and improving North Korea-US and North Korea-Japan relations.

As I stated in my opening remarks... *Land and history shape us as a people, mold our particular personality and attitudes.*

Here lie some of the roots of the North Korean regime obsession with acquiring nuclear weapons capability, its sense of vulnerability and fears - the Korean War, US military presence

at its borders, NATO orchestration of regime change in Iraq and Libya after the Ghadafi regime gave up its nuclear weapons program. And an obvious desire to be taken seriously as a regional military power.

But notwithstanding the abysmal failure of leadership of all nuclear powers to engage in serious dialogue towards full disarmament, we citizens of the world must never give up, we must continue to pursue the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and towards this goal we must mobilize one billion people across the world to demand the end of this stupidity and madness.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Who are the "international community" - leaders of Nations, the bloated and often self-serving bureaucracies of the international bodies like the UN and its many agencies, funds and programs, the World Bank, regional and national Banks, corporate sector, the opulent Churches of the world, the billionaires of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa who possess scandalous fortunes obtained mostly fraudulently. We are this amorphous international community who have mostly failed to root out systemic poverty and failed the peoples of Syria, South Sudan, Congo, Yemen. We have failed our fellow human beings, the 40% of humanity, still living in abject poverty in slums across the globe in the shadow of buildings of offensive opulence.

We have witnessed the holding of expensive Summits on Poverty, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); we know of the unfulfilled pledges by the rich industrialised countries in increasing contributions to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Commendable exceptions: the UK, Norway, Sweden.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has been literally obliterated since 2009; emergency humanitarian needs are not being met. But hundreds of billions of dollars were and are still easily found to rescue exposed European banks whose CEOs pay themselves scandalously high salaries and bonuses.

Portuguese, Spanish, Greek and Irish workers and middle classes have been force fed draconian austerity through higher taxes and social services cuts to pay for the debt incurred by

the banks of the few CEOs, the same cabal of people who through their greed and incompetence mismanaged their financial institutions in the first place.

I have been for long an admirer of the EU. It has shown genuine solidarity and has invested more in the developing world than any group of countries. Europeans have received more immigrants and refugees and allocated more generously for global humanitarian efforts than any other continent.

Perhaps it expanded and pursued political and economic integration too fast, particularly, after the end of the Cold War. The EU and the US pushed their luck too far in their relations with their giant Eastern neighbour, Russia. For many years, observing Europe-Russia relations from afar and up close, I could not understand why NATO saw the need to expand its borders right to Russia's gates. And I don't understand what additional US troops and hardware deployed close to Russia's borders hoped to achieve.

In the US, someone not a fan of multilateralism, the UN, EU or NATO, who disdains immigrants, refugees, Mexicans, Arabs and Muslims, now holds the nuclear button, and has begun to wreck international treaties (Climate Change, NAFTA, TPP), encouraging the breakup of the EU, and dismissing both the UN and NATO.

Some European leaders and people have shown great heart in welcoming their fellow human beings fleeing wars and deprivation, but understandably other European leaders and communities have been less generous, reacting often out of ignorance and fear. And let me clarify that when I use the word "understandably." I am not condoning the xenophobic mindset of many in Europe; I am simply saying that in any given society different people act or react differently in similar circumstances.

The US, Canada, the Latin American States, Australia and New Zealand are very much a product of the religious wars and extreme poverty in Europe that prompted the greatest movement of people ever in previous centuries.

We are living witnesses to an ongoing and irreversible demographic transformation of Europe, a repetition of the massive movement of people in previous centuries caused by wars and poverty in Europe prompting millions of Europeans to flee to the Americas.

No matter how high and thick our national walls may be, there will be no “fortress Europe” or “fortress US” that can stem the tide of people fleeing wars and poverty. The demographic transformation of Europe from a predominately aging Judaeo-Christian Continent to a vibrant and younger multiethnic, multi-religious and multi-culture Europe is unstoppable. These phenomena are not always entirely peaceful and sadly many will suffer immensely but with wisdom, determination and compassion Europe can emerge rejuvenated and stronger in the long run.

Will there be wisdom and realization that Europe is standing at an abyss, and that there is an urgent need for all to step back and engage in a grand dialogue on the challenges Europe and the world face?

Home to half of humanity, the Asia region remains a very promising one; however, I also believe that our region is the most dangerous of all, with the most intractable maritime and land border disputes, and with largest number of nuclear armed countries, and the ravaging of its natural resources.

Can we remain optimistic about Asia's future?

Whether the US approves or not, China is inexorably emerging as a new 21st Century global power. This inevitably leads to fears among China's neighbors. This being the case, it is China, an aspiring world power, that must behave as a responsible and benevolent power, and reassure its neighbors.

The world should not fear China, but China should fear itself: it has overwhelming challenges on its hands, a social time bomb in a population living longer, potentially with tens of millions on wheelchairs and with no social network to care for them.

The US replenishes its population with tens of millions of people from across the globe who then provide the children and youth that are necessary for a superpower to remain superpower.

China can be a new global power that does not have to possess an awesome military machine like the US. It can be a smart benign superpower relying more on soft diplomacy than on military hardware to convince and not to coerce. But China is still very far from being a global soft power. If China wishes to be a truly benign global power that conquers hearts and mind - and win friends and allies - it has to seriously rethink its development aid policies and action, trade and loan practices, improve the quality of the aid, restrain its voracious merchants from looting the rich seas, forests and rare minerals of peoples across the world.

For too many in China and Russia, and indeed in many other countries, the US is the real evil; in their view its actions are always inspired by its strategic hegemonic goals and selfish economic interests. This is an exaggeration, although it is understandable if one views the US through the prism of their past policies of invasions and supporting corrupt dictators in their own interests.

The 21st Century offers all a unique chance to coalesce around common global interests - reverse the nefarious consequences of climate change, manage clean water reserves that are becoming a rare commodity, save our polluted rivers, lakes and seas, replenish the depleted fish stock, eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, deescalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula and South China Sea, and between India and Pakistan, India and China, China and the US, Russia and the US.

I dream of the day when the great Asian civilizations - India, China, Japan and ROK - meet halfway and built a great Asian bridge of peace, friendship, solidarity and prosperity. That golden bridge would be decorated with millions of paper cranes, as innocently imagined by Sadako, innocent soul, an innocent victim of the first ever atomic bomb dropped on a people. After being diagnosed with leukemia from the atomic radiation, Sadako began to fold origami paper cranes, inspired by the Japanese legend that one who created a thousand origami cranes would be granted a wish. And Sadako's wish was to live.

For our wish to be achieved, these nations must first overcome the painful legacies of the past. For the sins of the imperial war, Japanese people paid the greatest price ever, their country was thoroughly destroyed. The proud Japanese people saw their Emperor surrender to the victorious Gen. MacArthur. An entire nation was humiliated. But the Japanese people resigned to their fate, did not protest. They suffered in silence and rebuilt their country.

China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the People's Democratic Republic of Korea, have all suffered enough. It is obvious that many carry still in their hearts the wounds of past wars. They must exorcise the demons of the past from their daily lives if they want this great region to live not in a perpetual "Cold Peace" but in real Peace, completely liberated from the nightmares of the past, live in security, tranquility and prosperity.

J. Ramos-Horta