

Korean Peninsula: United Nations Policy and Strategy
Submission to the Policy Committee

Recommendations:

- i. The United Nations system should have in place a coherent strategy and consistent approach towards the Korean Peninsula. It should focus on sustaining and, where possible, intensifying and expanding engagement with the DPRK.
- ii. The Secretary-General should consider upgrading UN efforts in the region to a more energetic, catalytic and constructive level, given the resumption of the still fragile six-party talks, as well as UN difficulties with the DPRK on political, humanitarian, development and human rights issues.
- iii. Within such a pro-active approach, UN strategy should concentrate on the following:
 - contribute towards progress of the six-party talks on the denuclearization of the Peninsula, the success of which should be top political priority;
 - initiate a sustained political dialogue with the DPRK;
 - help resolve humanitarian concerns in North Korea, advocating that such assistance be separate from security considerations and provided in accordance with identified needs;
 - promote, on the basis of a resumed UNDP country programme, meaningful economic reforms in the DPRK, including through its capacity building and preparing for its integration into the international economic and financial system;
 - engage the DPRK in a human rights dialogue;
 - contribute to establishing a multilateral peace and security mechanism in Northeast Asia.
- iv. To ensure system-wide consultation and cohesion of action, the Secretary-General should consider assigning a senior Secretariat official as Korean Peninsula Coordinator. While UN entities concerned will implement their respective mandates, the Coordinator will provide focused support to the UN system's work. DPA should assist the Coordinator to develop and implement, in close consultation with all concerned, an action plan towards the outlined strategy.

Background:

General

Since the Policy Committee's inconclusive consideration of UN strategy towards the Korean Peninsula in March 2006, the regional situation has undergone a dramatic upheaval caused by DPRK's escalatory moves which included a series of missile tests last July and a nuclear test last October. The international response has been firm and united. The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1695 condemning the missile tests and imposing missile trade sanctions, and later condemned the nuclear test and imposed a wide range of sanctions against the DPRK under Security Council resolution 1718. By these actions, the Security Council sent a clear message that it would not tolerate the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles programmes, a message reinforced by the unequivocal actions of China, the Republic of Korea and other regional powers. The Council also urged the six-party talks participants to implement their Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, thus creating a dichotomy between the need to engage the DPRK in a meaningful dialogue and the requirement for sanctions implementation.

Nuclear issue

The international resolve to stand up to the DPRK's nuclear ambitions, coupled with strong imperatives for the DPRK and the US to re-engage one another within the multilateral framework, revived the six-party talks, which resulted in the landmark accord of 13 February 2007 on initial actions to implement the 2005 Joint Statement. While the accord leaves the issue of existing nuclear weapons, and possibly nuclear material, for the next stage of negotiations, it opens a realistic prospect for verifiably terminating DPRK's nuclear programmes, including the disabling of its facilities in Yongbyon, possibly later this year. Importantly, the six parties accorded IAEA the task of monitoring and verifying the process of shutting down the Yongbyon nuclear facilities. The recent visit by the IAEA Director General to Pyongyang signified DPRK's intention to resume its cooperation with IAEA and the possibility of its eventual return to the NPT. The February accord solidified a comprehensive approach to the nuclear issue, i.e. to address the political, security, humanitarian, economic and other issues in a synchronized way. Current dynamics are positive, including intensified DPRK-US exchanges and resumed inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation. Progress remains fragile, however, as demonstrated by the complications over the release of North Korea's funds in Macao, due to deep-seated mistrust, the complexity of the issues at hand, and international misgivings about DPRK's policies.

The current UN role on the nuclear issue is focused mainly in the Security Council, which, pursuant to resolution 1718, is assisted by a sanctions committee. The IAEA is expected to undertake monitoring and verification functions in line with its mandate. At this juncture, the international community's best contribution toward achieving the denuclearization of the Peninsula would be to help the parties sustain positive momentum and build mutual trust and goodwill, as well as to facilitate the process in every practical way. The scope of possible contributions by the Secretary-General in addressing these issues is constrained both by the deliberations underway in the six-party talks and the Security Council. Public statements by the Secretary-General expressing his willingness to make a contribution were met with interest but, as yet, no active response.

Humanitarian Situation

The country requires massive international assistance if it is to avoid a looming humanitarian crisis. Food shortages and the dilapidated health care system are the priority concerns for the UN. In its latest report, FAO states that the total food shortage in 2007 is expected to be at least 1 million tons, representing 20% of the total food requirement for 2007. The fact that WFP's indispensable country programme, already significantly reduced as of last year, is only 18% resourced adds to the concern. The public health situation is also extremely fragile according to WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF. While malnutrition rates have fallen since the late 1990s, the vulnerability of the population remains high, especially with respect to women and children. There is a risk, therefore, that the gains in reversing the effects of malnutrition over the past decade will be lost. UNHCR, on its part, is concerned that the food crisis could trigger significant population movements.

In this context, the key challenges facing the humanitarian community in the DPRK are: (i) the DPRK's resistance to multilateral emergency assistance, if it is required to provide access to vulnerable populations and ensure adequate monitoring over the distribution of assistance; (ii) reduced donor response in light of the prevalent political situation, with some countries openly linking humanitarian assistance to the security situation; (iii) growing insistence by key donors that

the implementing agencies act in accordance with their established rules and procedures as opposed to special conditions in the DPRK; and (iv) continuing lack of reliable information and data in the DPRK. Access to vulnerable populations and the ability to monitor programme implementation in the DPRK has always been problematic. Unique restrictions continue to be imposed by the Government that contravene UN principles and are generally not practiced elsewhere. It should be noted that access was dramatically curtailed in 2006 as the operating agencies had access to only 29 of the 203 counties, as opposed to 160 in 2005 (representing 87% of the total civilian population).

As the UN system maintains relatively small-scale humanitarian programmes in the DPRK, it is not in a position to adequately meet even the most urgent humanitarian needs in North Korea. At the same time, it remains, as recently demonstrated by the successful UNICEF/WHO measles vaccination campaign, the best safety net available in the circumstances. As regards the food crisis, it is likely to be temporarily averted through bilateral assistance, even though the UN would provide the best out-reach mechanism to the vulnerable groups in North Korea.

Economic Development

The UN's development activities in the DPRK have always been controversial due to North Korea's isolation and donors' reluctance to cooperate with it economically. Nevertheless, it was UNDP, followed by other parts of the UN system, that pioneered this work and, despite the limited scope of this effort, provided an almost unique entry point for the UN in the country. In recent years, this area has gained particular importance as the DPRK leadership realized the need to modernize its economy and integrate into the international economic and financial system. An economic component, meanwhile, became - partly due to the Korean initiative by the previous Secretary-General - an integral part of the comprehensive approach towards resolving the nuclear issue.

The joint development, therefore, by the UN Country Team and the DPRK authorities of the strategic framework for its work in the country for 2007-2009, contained the seeds of taking the UN's work in that area to a new level. The Framework envisaged capacity building in economic management, sustainable energy, environmental management, increased food availability and basic social services as the key areas of cooperation.

With the suspension of the UNDP country programme in the DPRK, a big question mark exists over the UN's development activities in North Korea. While US concerns over UNDP financial transactions, and other alleged irregularities in the DPRK, should be met through the coming external audit and the necessary corrective action resulting from it, it is the Board's decision to cancel the economic management part of the country programme, at Japan's insistence, that represents the biggest challenge. Unless it is reversed, the UNDP programme risks being terminated. Rather than being able to support the six-party talks process and international engagement with North Korea at this critical juncture, the UN will lose its unique comparative advantage in that area altogether.

Human Rights

The UN remains the main venue for raising international grievances regarding the grave human rights situation in the DPRK. For two consecutive years, in 2005 and 2006, the General Assembly adopted resolutions on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, and the Human Rights

Council discussed it last March. Regrettably, the DPRK continues to refuse to cooperate with the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR), including on technical cooperation. It does not recognize the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, whose activities it views with hostility. The DPRK continues its non-cooperation with UNHCR on the issue of its nationals fleeing into the neighbouring countries, while China persists with its official line that those North Koreans are "illegal economic migrants." National efforts are equally ineffective in terms of improving the human rights situation in North Korea, although DPRK representatives claim to be willing to conduct bilateral dialogue on human rights issues outside the framework of GA decisions.

Options

1. **Status Quo Approach:** Even though the substantive role by the United Nations system in relation to the Peninsula has become considerably marginalized, the Secretary-General may decide to keep the Organization's effort at its current level. The relevant parts of the UN system will continue implementing their mandates to the best of their ability. The Secretary-General will involve himself on an *ad hoc basis* in order to resolve issues like the controversy surrounding the UNDP activities in the DPRK or expressing support for the six-party talks. The UN will continue its efforts, most likely without desired effect, to engage the DPRK in a productive dialogue.

Implications: The UN's ability to influence developments related to the DPRK and bigger issues in the Peninsula will continue to erode, both in political and humanitarian/ development terms. The UN will be able to provide only limited support to the efforts of the governments concerned in engaging North Korea, even though the six-party talks will need all possible support even under the best of circumstances.

2. **"Role of a Catalyst":** The Secretary-General may decide to appoint a Korean Peninsula Coordinator, who would provide him with focused advice on a coherent action by the United Nations system towards the region. While supporting the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs in the discharge of his/her responsibilities, the Coordinator would promote the Secretary-General's constructive role with regard to all aspects related to the six-party talks, helping to sustain its momentum and identifying entry points for the UN towards that end. The Coordinator would also provide support to the agencies concerned in their work in/with the DPRK, including the HCHR and UNHCR in their efforts to engage the DPRK in a human rights dialogue. The Coordinator would support the UN Country Team and strive to ensure a common approach by the UN system towards operational challenges through regular inter-agency consultation, information sharing and joint media approach. The Coordinator would work on the above through regular dialogue with the DPRK representatives as well as with other capitals concerned. Such interaction should also provide a timely indication regarding the necessity of a high-profile initiative for the Secretary-General.

Implications: The UN and its Secretary-General would be making an active, constructive and coherent effort with regard to one of the most challenging set of issues facing the international community. This approach should provide additional stability to the fragile six-party talks, while potentially playing a catalyst role in moving it forward. The approach should also help to expedite and deepen international engagement with the DPRK, as well as promote cooperation among the countries in the region. It should raise the effectiveness of the UN's work in the country, by putting it on a proper foundation, thus making it more credible for donors and promising to be of better help to the North Korean people with their humanitarian and development needs. Adding the

Secretary-General's voice to the pursuit of a non-nuclear, stable and secure Peninsula, would also positively contribute to the Organization's image.

3. **“Launching a Korean Peninsula Initiative”**: The Secretary-General has an option of launching an initiative of his own which would directly invoke the authority of his office and aim at a) establishing dialogue with the DPRK at the political level; b) joining the six-party talks process as an observer, if not a participant; c) putting forward the Secretary-General's own ideas and proposals to move the process forward; d) personally engaging the donor community with advocacy and resource mobilization for the UN's activities in the DPRK, and e) using the UN as an initial platform for a future regional forum to discuss peace and security in Northeast Asia. The Secretary-General may wish to appoint a high-level envoy to pursue this initiative.

Implications: While this is the boldest of options, it is also likely to be the least realistic under present circumstances, given that the governments concerned have not yet shown active interest in a high-profile initiative by the Secretary-General. Launching such an initiative without a clear interest from the Security Council and/or the participants in the six-party talks would be premature and counter-productive in the long-run. Moreover, the unresolved controversy over the UNDP's activities in the DPRK with the risk of UNDP's possible termination of its operations there will make constructive engagement by the Secretary-General with the country even more difficult. The failure of such an initiative from the very beginning could also hinder future UN efforts to address other peace and security issues that might arise in the years ahead in Northeast Asia or other regions. Launching such an initiative should be considered only on the basis of careful preparation and close consultations with the governments concerned. Should future developments require wider UN involvement in the Peninsula or a special initiative by the Secretary-General, including the appointment of a high-level envoy, the Secretary-General and the Policy Committee will have to consider the matter accordingly.

DPA
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