

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN



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The June 2000 summit meeting in P'yongyang between President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea and Chairman Kim Jong-il of North Korea was an epochal event in the history of Northeast Asia. The deep significance of the summit meeting derived from the fact that when the leaders of North and South Korea met for the very first time, they did so with the full support of their immediate neighbors — China, Russia and Japan — as well as the United States. The P'yongyang summit opened the way to a new era in Northeast Asia, and gave to all of the major powers an opportunity to work together to bring a period of reconciliation and stability to a region whose history has been marked by tension, rivalry and savage conflict.

In the happy aftermath of the meeting in P'yongyang, The Korea Society's Annual Dinner on September 8, 2000 was clearly the high point of the year. President Kim Dae-jung was the honored guest, and he presented the Van Fleet Award to President Jimmy Carter for his vital role in averting a major crisis with North Korea in 1994. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger gave eloquent summary remarks at the end of the dinner, paying tribute to the achievements of both presidents. Interestingly enough, it was the first time that President Carter and Secretary Kissinger had appeared together in public.

The final months of 2000 were marked by a series of rapidly escalating meetings between officials of the United States and North Korea, culminating in a visit by Secretary of State Albright to P'yongyang. President Clinton was seriously contemplating going to P'yongyang himself, to arrange an end to North Korean missile testing, but in the end decided not to make the trip. The presidency has since changed hands, and P'yongyang's relations with both Seoul and Washington have been more or less on hold.

The great question for the year 2001 and beyond is how the United States and North Korea will re-start their dialogue. The stage is still set for a new era to begin in Northeast Asia, but for that to happen, the United States will have to become more directly involved.

The activities summarized in this report document The Korea Society's continuing efforts to promote a deeper and clearer understanding of trends and events pertaining to Korea on the part of all Americans.