

Remarks by
Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations

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I am deeply moved and honoured to be with you, and to offer my warmest wishes to those being honoured this evening.

As you know, I spend my days grappling with big and difficult issues. Darfur, the Middle East, climate change. Sometimes it seems as if every problem comes to the door of the United Nations -- and to the door of my office on the 38th floor of the United Nations building.

But whatever happens, I also keep a close eye on events on the Korean Peninsula. The developments that unfold there are of profound significance to the United Nations. And the issues the United Nations deals with daily -- peace, security, national reconciliation, development -- are all very much at stake there.

That is why I am proud to have the privilege to say a few words to President Lee tonight.

As a Korean, I applaud your leadership in building an ever more advanced nation, and your determination to build a global Korea. In this context, let me mention that I just returned from my first visit to Russia as Secretary-General. As I was meeting with Russian leaders down on Earth, my compatriot Yi So-yeon was floating in outer space with Russian cosmonauts on board the International Space Station. She took kimchi and instant noodles with her into space, and, far more important, a United Nations flag.

President Lee, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am even more proud of your leadership in advancing your vision of a global Korea in partnership with the world's most global organization—the United Nations. As challenges multiply in our world, we need the Republic of Korea on many fronts.

We need the Republic of Korea to share its experience in becoming a democracy and an economic powerhouse. Developing countries stand to benefit greatly from Korea's real-life experience in going from a receiving to a donor country. I hope Korea will be even more generous in its official development assistance, so it plays its full part in the global efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

We need the Republic of Korea to share its expertise in our efforts to make the United Nations more modern and results-oriented. Such a transformation is essential if we are to succeed in our work for development, peace and human rights.

We need the Republic of Korea to share its visionary thinking and technological know-how in the quest for collective solutions to the global challenges of our age. From climate change to health, these are challenges that no one country can take on alone.

We need the Republic of Korea to pursue its active and constructive role in addressing the nuclear issue on the Peninsula, through the six-party talks. Thanks to the political will of the leaders of the countries involved, and the creativity and perseverance of the negotiators, the process continues to move forward step by step. My admiration goes to Ambassador Hill and his counterparts.

As we move forward, this task will become even more arduous. The United Nations and the international community will need to redouble their support. The best way to complement the six-party process is to build on progress achieved in the inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation over the past decade. I will do all I can to advance this work. We should also support the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's efforts to address the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable in its population.

Mr. President, you epitomize the Korean "can-do" spirit and provide an inspiration to so many of us. Because of your strong drive and determination, because you always get things done, you are sometimes known as "The Bulldozer".

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, coping with a range of challenges—from peace and security to climate change, from the eradication of poverty to the massive renovation of our historic United Nations building—I desperately need your Bulldozer spirit.

Please make sure some of it rubs off on me during your visit. If you do, it will benefit not only me but the entire United Nations family.

In the road ahead, we are fortunate to have many wise friends, whose counsel and support we can rely on. A leading one among them is Don Oberdorfer, Chairman of the United States-Korea Institute at John Hopkins University.

Mr. Oberdorfer, your first-hand, intimate experience of Korea, and your dynamic, constructive vision of the Korean Peninsula, make you a superbly deserving recipient of this year's Van Fleet Award. I am profoundly grateful for your contribution to building goodwill, dialogue and better understanding between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, all of which are needed to help resolve our Korean challenges.

And I am grateful to all of you here tonight for keeping your eye, with me, on the fate of Korea in the world.