

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

The undersigned coalition of national organizations write in light of your administration's plans to conduct a North Korea policy review. As groups working together to champion a more secure and sustainable path forward on US-North Korea policy, we are encouraged by your urgent attention to this critical issue.

As Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted, US policy toward North Korea has not only failed to meet its stated goal of denuclearization, but resulted in a worsening problem. We believe your administration has an opportunity to pursue a new approach that prioritizes peace in ways that would meaningfully advance US-North Korean relations and reduce nuclear risk where decades of pressure have failed.

In fact, there are growing voices in Congress that recognize the importance of a peace-based approach with North Korea. In a historic vote, the House of Representatives passed an amendment to the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act recognizing that diplomacy is essential for navigating a realistic path forward on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and that a formal end to the Korean War plays a critical role toward that goal. Additionally, House Resolution 152, which calls for a formal end to the Korean War and a peace agreement, garnered the support of over 50 Congress Members in the 116th Congress.

We strongly urge you to focus on the hard work of sustained diplomacy with North Korea and commit to the following principles:

End the Korean War. Even though active hostilities between the United States and North Korea ended 67 years ago with an Armistice Agreement, there was never a formal end to the war with a peace agreement. This continued state of war is the root cause of militarism and tensions that must be resolved if there is to be real progress with North Korea. As a [new report](#) from the Korea Peace Now! campaign finds, a peace agreement that ends the wartime status quo would reduce tensions and foster more effective engagement on critical issues such as improved human rights and denuclearization. Formally ending the Korean War is the most effective trust-building mechanism available. It costs zero dollars and removes North Korea's stated justification for nuclear weapons. Such a move would not undermine the US-South Korea alliance or US interests in the region, particularly if the US's overall regional strategy is rooted in diplomatic engagement, as the Quincy Institute's recent [report](#) recommends.

Agree to a gradual, reciprocal, verifiable process. The United States cannot realistically expect North Korea to unilaterally disarm before providing any sanctions relief, security guarantees, or other incentives. We urge you to reject calls to pursue a maximalist "all or nothing" approach and instead focus on actions that can move us towards advancing peace and denuclearization.

Build confidence and reduce tensions. Until talks can resume, there are many interim steps that the administration can take to shore up the potential for a successful diplomatic process. These steps include, but are not limited to:

- Reaffirming past commitments, including those most recently made in the 2018 Singapore Joint Declaration, which constructively called for new relations based on peaceful coexistence and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula
- Strengthening sanctions exemptions for humanitarian activities and lifting the travel ban to improve humanitarian access, such as the repatriation of the remains of US service members and people-to-people exchanges
- Suspending large-scale military exercises, both as a mutual security measure and particularly in light of the risks presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic
- Facilitating reunions between long-divided North Korean and Korean American families, and granting any necessary sanctions waivers for in-person or video reunions between separated South Korean and North Korean families
- Refraining from actions that constrict or complicate diplomacy, such as deploying additional missile defenses, enacting sanctions that impede talks and confidence building, employing hostile rhetoric, or rejecting leader-to-leader engagement

Make the negotiating table more inclusive. It is imperative that those impacted by current policies have a seat at the table. Including the views and recommendations of women, youth, and other members of civil society will improve the chances that a peace agreement will last longer and be more durable. We commend your recognition of the need to shape US foreign policy in a more democratic way that reflects the diversity of Americans, and look forward to engaging with your administration as it reviews policy on North Korea.

As you noted in your Special Contribution to *Yonhap News* just before the election, “Words matter -- and a president's words matter even more.” In that article you committed to principled diplomacy and reuniting Korean American families with their loved ones in the North. The steps outlined above form the core of ‘principled diplomacy’ and we urge you to implement them as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Arms Control Association
Beyond the Bomb
Council for a Livable World
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Just Foreign Policy
Mennonite Central Committee - U.S. Washington Office
Peace Action
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Win Without War
Women Cross DMZ

CC: Secretary Antony Blinken