

**Address by
President Moon Jae-in
on the 72nd Anniversary of Liberation**

August 15, 2017

My fellow Koreans, decorated independence activists and their families,
compatriots residing overseas,

We celebrate the first Liberation Day since the era of popular sovereignty was ushered in by the candlelight rallies. Today, its meaning seems especially more profound.

Popular sovereignty is not a term our contemporaries used for the first time. One hundred years ago in July 1917, the Declaration of Great Unity and Solidarity announced in Shanghai by 14 independence activists made it clear that popular sovereignty was the ideology of the independence movement. It declared that the National Humiliation Day in 1910, when the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was signed, was not the day when our national sovereignty was lost, but the day when popular sovereignty was born. The Declaration first claimed that a provisional government should be founded predicated on popular sovereignty. Finally, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established on the basis of the Declaration in the wake of the nationwide independence movement against imperialist Japan in March 1919, transcending ideology, class and region.

Popular sovereignty became the founding ideology of the Republic of Korea through the establishment of the Provisional Government, and we are inheriting its spirit today. The aspiration of our forebears to build a nation where the people are the rightful owners had continued for over a century, and it has finally been realized by the people holding aloft candles.

Liberation was not something that was just given to us. It was something that was regained by our 30 million forefathers who kept the flame for freedom and independence alive even when they were deprived of everything, even their Korean names. Let alone those who gave their lives for the nation's self-reliant independence, mothers who mended the clothes of their children who set out for the independence movement, teachers who taught Korean secretly in night schools not to be noticed by Japanese imperialists, and those who carried on our tradition and pitched in with small amounts of money are all the protagonists of liberation.

Liberation was the reward for the sacrifices, dedication, and blood of our patriotic forefathers, from the volunteer righteous armies to the Korean Liberation Army. There were no differences in profession, gender and age. There were so many independence activists to remember: Dr. Lee Tae-joon who was a member of the Heroic Corps and eradicated a contagious disease in Mongolia; Dong-a Ilbo reporter Jang Deok-jun who went missing while covering the Gando Massacre; the mother of the Independence Army Nam Ja-hyeon who fought in an armed-independence organization in West Gando; scientist Kim Yong-gwan who intended to promote science to strengthen the national power; and film director Na Woon-gyu who was a member of the Independence Army.

The stage for the independence movement was not limited only to the Korean Peninsula. On March 1, 1919, chants for Korea's independence reverberated in one voice throughout many parts of the Russian Maritime Province, Manchuria, North America and Asia.

All these splendid chapters in the history of the independence movement against Japan came back to life as the candlelight rallies last winter in every corner of the country and many parts of the world where our compatriots live. The candles held up high by the people carried on the spirit of the independence movement.

The great spirit of the independence movement resurged as democratization and economic development, helping create today's Republic of Korea. Every single individual who made sacrifices and worked hard in the process are contributors to building this nation.

Today, I want to offer my deepest respect and gratitude once again to the decorated independence fighters and their families, all those who triumphed over the period of darkness with their own ways of resisting the Japanese imperialists, and the people who made it possible to open a new era with the candlelight rallies.

Moreover, I hope the day we celebrate today will become a day to contemplate on the courage and wisdom needed against difficulties and crises facing our nation and people.

Distinguished decorated independence activists and their families,

There is an old, historic residence called *Imcheonggak* in Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province. It was the home of Seokju Lee Sang-ryong who

disposed of all of his family's assets when Korea was colonized and fled into exile in Manchuria. There, he established the Military School of the New Rising and laid the foundation for armed-independence struggles. *Imcheonggak* was home to as many as nine independence fighters and is a symbolic space representing noblesse oblige of the Republic of Korea.

In retaliation, the Japanese imperialists laid a railroad track right through the grounds of the residence. *Imcheonggak* used to be a huge residence with 99 rooms, but it still remains just half of what it was. Lee Sang-ryong's grandchildren even lived in an orphanage in Korea after liberation. Today's *Imcheonggak* is the reality of the Republic of Korea that we should revisit. We failed to properly wipe out the vestiges of Japanese imperialism and pro-Japanese collaborators. We failed to firmly uphold the national spirit.

Forgetting one's history is tantamount to losing one's roots. We should no longer leave our independent activists as forgotten heroes. Honoring them must not remain mere lip service.

The saying that those who engaged in the independence movement would only leave poverty even to their third-generation descendants should be proven wrong. The reality that the situation of the pro-Japanese collaborators and the independence fighters never changed even after liberation created a distorted perception that justified compromises with injustice.

The attitude of the country toward honoring the independence activists will be completely made anew. Their great cause will be repaid with the utmost respect and decorum. The children and grandchildren of independence fighters will be held in esteem, and the Government will support all of them for stable living conditions. By doing so, it will try and imbue the public with an awareness that dedication to the nation will result in even their children and grandchildren being honored.

The Government will establish a memorial hall of the Provisional Government so that generations to come will be able to remember the meritorious conduct of our independence activists. It will discover every single historic site like *Imcheonggak* that should be remembered as part of the independence movement. It will also identify every possible forgotten independence activist and preserve overseas historic sites related to the independence movement.

The Government intends to take this opportunity and completely rebuild the framework for caring for our patriots and veterans. The Republic of Korea stands

on the sacrifices and devotion of those who protected its name, regained the country and willingly answered the call of their country. Endeavors will be made to create a country that will properly reciprocate their sacrifices and dedication.

Honoring the decorated independence activists and war veterans, who devoted the prime of their lives to the country and have now become aged, will be further strengthened. The Government will take responsibility for their medical treatment while they are alive. It will also raise war veteran honor allowances.

The Government will strive to make sure that the last decorated patriot could feel the warm embrace of the Republic of Korea and great pride living in this country. Assistance for the bereaved families of servicepersons, police officers and firefighters who were sacrificed on duty will be expanded. I believe all this will become the source of our pride.

My Administration will clearly establish the identity of the Republic of Korea with the welfare policy for veterans and patriots; it will ensure that the welfare of veterans and patriots serves as the starting point of patriotism.

My fellow Koreans,

Now is the time to face up to the pain people had to endure, which was caused by the nation's failure to protect its people.

The pain from forced mobilization during the Japanese colonial rule still persists 70 years after liberation. Though some truths about forced mobilization have so far come to light, the whole picture of the damage has yet to be revealed. It is necessary to address what has been revealed first, and the Government and the civilian sector have to join forces to deal with what has not been disclosed. If inter-Korean relations are improved, the Government would explore the possibility for a South-North joint fact-finding survey on the damage of forced mobilization.

Many of our compatriots could not return to their mother country following liberation. Home visits by Koreans living in Japan will be normalized irrespective of their nationality from a humanitarian perspective. The wounds from compulsory mobilization and forced deportation still remain all over Siberia and Sakhalin. We will share fraternity with those living in those areas.

Fellow Koreans, decorated patriots who fought for the nation's independence and bereaved families, overseas Koreans,

On the occasion of Liberation Day today, the continued escalation of military tensions surrounding the Korean Peninsula weighs heavily on our mind.

The division of the nation is the unfortunate legacy of the colonial era that made it impossible for us to determine our destiny on our own in the midst of cold war rivalries. However, our national power has now been enhanced to the extent that we can decide our fate on our own volition. We, with our own strength, have to achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula and overcome the division.

Needless to say, the call of the times on the Korean Peninsula is peace. The overcoming of the division through the settlement of peace on the Korean Peninsula is the path to truly completing national liberation.

Peace is also an urgently needed strategy for our survival. Security, the economy, growth and prosperity cannot guarantee a bright future in the absence of peace. Peace is not an issue that simply concerns ourselves. If there is no peace on the Korean Peninsula, there will be no peace in Northeast Asia; if there is no peace in Northeast Asia, world peace will not be possible. As of now, the whole world is witnessing that apparent truth in fear. The path we have to take now is clear. That is to embark on a long and great journey to build a lasting peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia together with the entire international community.

The biggest challenge facing us now is the North Korean nuclear and missile issue. The Government takes the current security situation very seriously. On the basis of the robust ROK-U.S. alliance, it will work very closely together with the United States to resolve the security crisis. Still, we cannot rely only on our ally for our security. When it comes to matters related to the Korean Peninsula, our country has to take the initiative in resolving them.

The principle of my Administration is unwavering. The national interest of the Republic of Korea is our top priority and is just. War must never break out again on the Korean Peninsula. Only the Republic of Korea can make the decision for military action on the Korean Peninsula. Without the consent of the Republic of Korea, no country can determine to take military action. The Government will do all it can to prevent a war from breaking out. No matter what twists and turns we undergo, the North Korean nuclear problem must be addressed in a peaceful manner. In this regard, my Administration's position is not different from that of the U.S. Government.

The Government will redouble its diplomatic endeavors to make sure that the principle of peaceful resolution does not waver in the international community. To build a robust peace backed by defense capabilities, our country's armed forces will be innovated to become stronger and more reliable, thereby further enhancing our defense capabilities. However, the door for dialogue between military authorities will remain open in order not to further aggravate the military tensions between the South and the North.

Applying sanctions against the North and pursuing dialogue are not a matter of one thing having to be done before the other. The past history of the North Korean nuclear problem showed that a clue to resolving the problem was found when sanctions were combined with dialogue.

We have to remember the fact that the North maintained a moratorium on the test firing of missiles and announced a plan to suspend a nuclear test when the two Koreas maintained good relations. At that time, dialogue between the North and the United States as well as between the North and Japan were promoted, and multilateral diplomacy in Northeast Asia was active. This is the reason why I made clear at every chance that the Republic of Korea must be the country that takes the helm in addressing matters concerning the Korean Peninsula.

The resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue has to start with a nuclear freeze. When the North at least stops additional nuclear testing and missile provocations, the conditions for dialogue can be created. The purpose of enhanced sanctions and pressure against the North is not to heighten military tensions but to bring it back to the negotiating table. In this regard, the position of the Korean Government is not different from that of the U.S. Government.

I urge the North Korean authorities to the following. Without cooperation and harmonious coexistence with other nations, it is impossible to achieve economic growth. If things continue this way, the North would end up facing international isolation and a dismal future. It would put the survival of many of its people and the whole Korean Peninsula in jeopardy. The South cannot help but further enhance sanctions and pressure against the North. The North has to stop provocations immediately and come forward for dialogue, thus creating a situation in which it does not have to worry about its security even without nuclear weapons. The South will strive to help create such a situation. The United States and neighboring countries will also render help.

Let me make it clear: we do not want North Korea to collapse. We will neither pursue unification by absorbing the North nor seek artificial unification. Unification needs to be carried out in 'a peaceful and democratic manner' to which each and every Korean agrees. If the North promises the mutual implementation of existing inter-Korean agreements, we will institutionalize the agreements through a vote at the National Assembly so that the policy toward North Korea will not differ despite the change of administrations.

For a long time, I have talked about the idea of a new economic map for the Korean Peninsula. Economic cooperation between South and North Korea and in Northeast Asia will bring about the shared prosperity of the two Koreas and alleviate military tension. In the process, the North will naturally be able to realize that its security can be guaranteed without a nuclear weapon.

I propose to the North again that we start with easy tasks first. We need to resume humanitarian cooperation as soon as possible, such as on the issue of families separated by the Korean War. There is only a short time left to attend to their sorrow. I urge the North to respond quickly to proposals to allow family reunions and visits to hometowns and ancestral graves.

The upcoming PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games is a good opportunity for the two Koreas to take a step forward on the road to peace. We need to make the PyeongChang Winter Games the Olympics of peace. We need to make it an opportunity for inter-Korean dialogue and the establishment of the foundation for peace. In Northeast Asia, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics, the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics will be held one after another, and it is a golden opportunity to promote peace and economic cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. I suggest that all the leaders in Northeast Asia put their heads together to take advantage of this opportunity. In particular, Korea, China and Japan should make endeavors together to institutionalize regional security and economic cooperation and share joint responsibility. I also ask all of you to unite behind this cause.

Fellow Koreans,

Every year on Liberation Day, we cannot help but look back on Korea-Japan relations. Korea-Japan relations should now go beyond the bilateral relationship and grow into a cooperative relationship in which the two countries work together for the peace and prosperity of Northeast Asia.

It is not desirable for the past history and historical issues to continue to hold back the forward-looking development of the Korea-Japan relations. The Government will expand various exchanges, including shuttle diplomacy, for the renewal of Korea-Japan relations. We have no other choice than to reinforce bilateral cooperation in order to jointly respond to the present North Korean nuclear and missile threats. While putting emphasis on the forward-looking Korea-Japan relations, however, we cannot overlook the historical issue. On the contrary, when we properly settle the historical issue, trust between the two countries will go even deeper.

Many Japanese politicians and intellectuals have made efforts so far to squarely face the past involving the two countries and Japan's responsibility. These efforts have contributed to the forward-looking development of Korea-Japan relations. Such historical recognition should not be changed according to Japan's domestic political circumstances. The obstacle to the Korea-Japan relations is not the past history itself but the Japanese Government's inconsistent acknowledgment of the history.

Resolving the historical issues between Korea and Japan, including the wartime sexual slavery by the Japanese military and forced mobilization, should be based on international principles that consist of the restoration of the honor of the victims and compensation, the clarification of the truth and a promise to prevent any recurrence in line with the universal value of human life and a national consensus. The Government will stick to these principles under all circumstances. There needs to be a courageous attitude on the part of the Japanese leaders.

My fellow Koreans, decorated independence activists and bereaved families, and compatriots residing overseas,

The year 2019, two years from now, is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Provisional Republic of Korea Government. Liberation Day next year on August 15, 2018, is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Government.

To us, genuine liberation is to take the path to unite the people that were divided by foreign powers. To us, genuinely repaying patriotic deeds is to build a proper nation, a nation of the people, by realizing popular sovereignty, which is an ideology set by the patriotic martyrs for the foundation of the nation.

Let us start preparing right away. In the process, even settling the issues of the history of the past century in pursuit of healing, reconciliation and unity will be possible.

As the classification into conservative and progressive was meaningless in the face of the enormous flow of popular sovereignty, we should now move beyond the differentiation of the forces behind industrialization and the forces behind democratization in modern history.

All of us are living under the legacy of history. There is always light and shadow in all histories, and in that sense, dividing an era that has become part of individuals' lives into the time of industrialization and the time of democratization is not only impossible but also meaningless. Moon Jae-in, who is serving in the 19th presidential term, is in the middle of the history of all the presidents of the Republic of Korea from Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun to Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee.

I discussed the value of patriotism in the last Memorial Day speech in the hope for healing, reconciliation and unity in Korean society. We should now start settling the issues of the history of the past century, and we should start reestablishing the value of community again for another century. The basis of the new policies of the Government is adjusted to this. Regardless of the views of the conservatives, the progressives and the political parties, I hope each and every one will participate together in the preparations for the new century.

Fellow Koreans,

Today, let us make an announcement together. There are many challenges coming toward us, but let us dare to shout out that we, the people of the Republic of Korea, are the best in adapting to and riding out new changes. Let us boldly meet the new challenges with confidence. In the name of the Republic of Korea, let us unite and win like we always have. Let us complete our task of building a nation of the people, a just Republic of Korea. Let us demonstrate our potential once again.

I would like to extend my deepest respect to the decorated independence activists who gave their all for the nation. I wish you all good health.

Thank you.