

UPF and AIPP Canada's expert briefing on N. Korea on Parliament Hill in Ottawa

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Ottawa, Canada -- "Can strategic trade with North Korea help promote peace and prosperity?" was the theme of an expert briefing held on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada. The meeting, organized by the Universal Peace Federation and the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace, was made possible by the Honorable Robert-Falcon Ouellette, member of Parliament for central Winnipeg, who secured a splendid room in the House of Commons, complete with translation facilities for our two official languages.

The briefing, centered on a panel of four experts and a keynote speaker, focused on inter-Korean relations, the question of the reunification of the two Koreas, Canadian–Korean relations, international trade, human rights, diplomacy, the evolving geopolitical realities in the region and more.

The session opened with Dr. Moonshik Kim, chair of UPF-Canada, and the Hon. Robert-Falcon Ouellette, giving welcoming remarks to the group. Dr. Daniel Stringer then contextualized the briefing (which was taking place a short week after the historic Trump–Kim Summit in Singapore) by posing for the panel the simple question: "Could North Korea transition from a command economy into a burgeoning entrepreneurial economy, as China has done, and is there a role for Canada to play through a limited, selective and verifiable trade arrangement with North Korea designed to bring a modicum of prosperity to the ordinary citizenry?"

The first presentation, delivered by a young research analyst, Yun Sik James Hwang, with the NATO Association of Canada, addressed the high economic cost of North–South integration and called for empathy, not sympathy, for the North Korean population. He reminded us of past investments that western companies had made in North Korea only to have them nationalized.

Dr. Tina Park, one of Canada's foremost experts on North Korea and Canadian–Korean relations and co-founder and executive director of the Canadian Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, based at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, followed by speaking of Canada's longstanding relations with Korea and pointing out that Canadians first visited the Korean peninsula as missionaries in the 19th century. Suggesting that human rights concessions should precede any increase in trade with the North, Park noted that despite \$1 billion going to the South Korean Ministry of Unification each year, young people, a large demographic in that country, are not keen on reunification.

Ambassador Margaret Huber offered her perspective as a long time Canadian diplomat. Having traveled to South Korea first in 1975 and North Korea in 1983 with the Canada Trade Commission, she noted that unpredictability is a big problem for trade and commerce, not to mention diplomacy. Observing that engagement is an instrument of statecraft and not an endorsement of a foreign government's policies, she declared that North Korea was winning on the world public relations front. With the fourth largest standing army in the world, what does North Korea want from Canada? she asked. Perhaps recognition in the form of an embassy in Ottawa, she suggested. For greater diplomatic success in dealing, for instance, with North Korea, Ambassador Huber recommended increased academic exchange, an interdepartmental study group, and greater training for diplomats in difficult languages like Korean.

Zhihao Yu, full professor at the Department of Economics, Carleton University, spoke about the trade-development and trade-compliance dynamic. He suggested that on the one hand, trade can make North

Korea more prosperous and powerful; on the other hand, as the volume of trade increases, so does North Korea's risk of loss due to noncompliance with international security obligations specifically related to nuclear weapons. He believes that trade can achieve much more in both North Korea's compliance and prosperity, and would produce a similar result to that of the United States opening up trade with China in the 1970s.



After a break, the group convened again to hear the keynote address given by Alexandre Mansourov, a specialist in Northeast Asian security, politics, and economics. Focusing primarily on the Korean peninsula, he did his research as a visiting scholar at the U.S.–Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and served as a founding member of the U.S. National Committee on North Korea and as a senior associate of the Nautilus Institute. Introduced by Honorable Ouellette, Dr. Mansourov proceeded to outline four schools of thought on why North Korea suddenly shifted its approach toward the United States:

- The pain of sanctions,
- Kim's cunning tactical plan to buy time,
- Kim is experiencing a transformation of his soul and outlook,
- Fear of unpredictable U.S. action.

Noting that U.S. President Trump and North Korea's Chairman Kim set up a hotline between them and that Pompeo's team spent a lot of time in North Korea preparing for the summit and will soon return to the North, Mansourov pointed out that Trump cut the Gordian Knot by using positive-sum diplomacy and thinking outside the box. Among other disclosed and nondisclosed results of the summit, North Korea has agreed to reduce the size of its army and remove all surface-to-surface missiles positioned at its border with the Republic of Korea.

On human rights, Mansourov's comments ran counter to the current portrayal of the situation in North Korea. As a grandchild of a non-survivor of the Soviet Gulag system, he called the characterization of the human rights situation in North Korea highly politicized: There are no gas chambers, no gulags, no mass graves. Families of incarcerated parents are allowed to stay together with their parents, for example, he noted.

The conference concluded with extensive discussion and contributions by the members of parliament and other participants.

Inspired and guided by the timely vision of conference coordinator Daniel Stringer, the briefing was organized and executed by the dedicated UPF-Canada team with much of the work done pro bono.