

ILC Osaka, Japan: 100 Experts Participate in ILC Focusing on the Korea

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Osaka, Japan -- On March 20, 2021, one-hundred experts and scholars from various fields gathered online for a special International Leadership Conference (ILC) webinar for the Kinki, Chugoku and Shikoku regions UPF-Japan's Association of Ambassadors for Peace Kinki/Chugoku/Shikoku convened in cooperation with the Institute for Peace Policies (IPP) on the topic of the situation of the Korean Peninsula.

After welcoming remarks by the organizers, Prof. Kan Kimura of the Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies (GSICS) at Kobe University gave the keynote address on the "Changing Korean Peninsula and Japan: How to Understand the Korean Peninsula Situation," which was followed by a discussion among the invited experts.

Prof. Kimura began by pointing out that the Japanese media's reporting on Korea tends to be biased and to focus on negative news. News needs to be examined rationally with objective data, he said. He went on to emphasize that the deterioration of Japan-Korea relations starting around 1990 occurred not simply because of the past and matter of apologies, but has been influenced by the decline in the importance of Japan to and its share of trade with South Korea. The latter has fallen from 35 to 7 percent.

He also said that the Japanese and South Korean government's differences over the issue of comfort women and forced laborers is due to Japan's judicial culture. While the culture places importance on the stability of legal interpretations there's a "judicial reluctance" that places international law above the Constitution. South Korea's judicial culture, on the other hand, is one of "judicial activism" in which the zeitgeist is incorporated into legal interpretations and national laws are placed above international law.

In addition, although Japan views the administration of the South Korean President Moon Jae-In as anti-Japanese because it is a leftist government, the administration's policy toward Japan is supported by conservatives. And, even if the administration were to change, Japan-Korea relations are unlikely to improve. Furthermore, even though the gap in national power between Japan and South Korea is already in the past and Japan-South Korea relations are leveling, old perceptions of Korea remain in Japan, which makes it difficult for the country to recognize the current situation.

Following the keynote address, former ambassador of Japan and president of the Kyoto Japan-Korea Friendship Association, Amb. Kishichiro Amae, commented: "The administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-In stresses the importance of dialogue with North Korea, however, Japan still has [to resolve] the abduction and nuclear [weapons] issues. Therefore, a dialogue should be held between Japan and South Korea at the highest level based on the common interests of those nations. If South Korea approaches North Korea and becomes a federal state as well as becomes a nuclear power with anti-Japan sentiments, it would be a great threat to Japan. To prevent this from happening, Japan should always pay attention to [its relations with] South Korea."

During the discussion with the participants, Mr. Yoshisumi Asai, a part-time lecturer in the Department of Global and Regional Culture at Doshisha University, pointed out that since Japan-Korea relations are linked to Inter-Korean relations, it is important to analyze it from this perspective. "Around 1992, when the comfort women issue surfaced, Japan-South Korea relations deteriorated, North Korea was in negotiation with the United States and Japan on reconciliation. In order to take the initiative in the U.S.-DPRK negotiations and Japan-DPRK negotiations, North Korea made a move while Japan-Korea-U.S. relations were not orchestrated, [which led] to a worsening of Japan-Korea relations."