

What was Discussed at the US Capitol Policy Forum Last Week?

James Flynn
May 7, 2026
Hyun Jin Moon's Global Peace Foundation



Capitol Policy Forum Highlights

Advancing a Freedom-Centered Vision for a Free and Unified Korea



“A unified and free Korea is not some distant aspirational goal, but the best and perhaps only viable means to ending the security threat.”

— Amb. Robert Joseph, Senior Scholar, National Institute for Public Policy

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Korean Unification is More Than a Policy Goal



“Reunification is a moral imperative.”

— Namsik Yoo, Director of Youth Programs, Alliance for Korea United-USA

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International Forum on One Korea: Capitol Policy Forum Charts a New Path Forward for Korea, Centering Freedom, People, and Unification

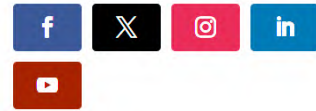
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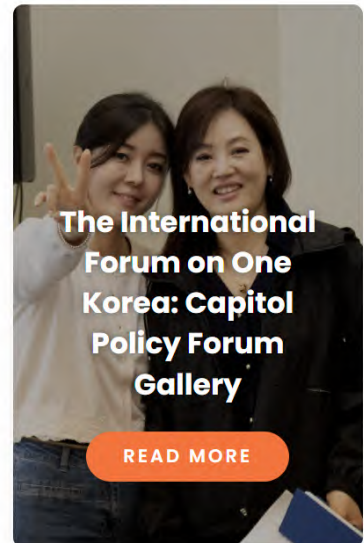
The International Forum on One Korea: Capitol Policy Forum, held on April 29, 2026, at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., brought together policymakers, experts, civil society leaders, and North Korean escapees to examine a bold shift in strategy for addressing the Korean Peninsula. Convened by the Global Peace Foundation (GPF), alongside partners including Action for Korea United, Defense Forum Foundation, Alliance for Korea United USA, and One Korea Foundation, the forum challenged decades of policy centered narrowly on denuclearization and instead advanced a comprehensive vision of a free and unified Korea as the strategic framing that can resolve the security and human rights issues on the Korean Peninsula.

Held during North Korea Freedom Week under the theme “Free and Unified Korea Policy Endgame,” the forum centered on a clear message: Korean unification must be understood not as a distant aspiration, but as the necessary framework for resolving both the security threat posed by the North Korean regime and the ongoing human rights crisis facing its people. Opening the program, Jeremy Graham, director of Strategic Development of GPF, emphasized the importance of elevating voices often marginalized in policy discussions—those of North Korean escapees—so that “the voices and the need for a free and unified Korea” remain at the forefront of international dialogue. What followed was a series of testimonies and policy discussions that built a compelling case for

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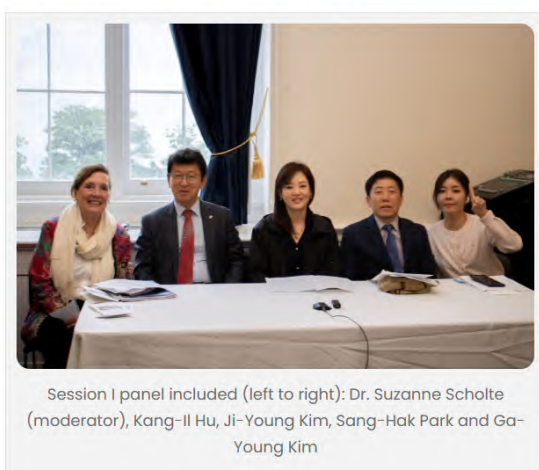
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rethinking both the problem and its solution through a comprehensive vision rooted in Hongik Ingan, freedom, and the economic potential of a unified Korea.

The first panel, featuring North Korean escapees, anchored the discussion in real-life experiences. Hu Kang-il, head of the Committee for the Democratization of North Korea, reframed unification as a deeply personal and moral necessity. "For North Korean escapees, unification is not simply a political event," he said. "It means being reunited with family members. It is the restoration of a life worthy of human dignity." His remarks highlighted a recurring theme throughout the forum: that the division of the peninsula is not only a geopolitical issue but also a deeply human one affecting millions who remain separated from their families and denied basic freedoms.



Speakers repeatedly emphasized that North Korean escapees are not passive

victims but active agents of change. "North Korean escapees are not merely beneficiaries; they are agents of change," Hu asserted, calling for sustained international support to strengthen escapee-led organizations working on human rights advocacy and information dissemination. Their testimonies illustrated both the severity of conditions inside North Korea and the transformative power of access to truth.

One escapee shared a pivotal childhood moment that altered the course of their life: "When I was 13 years old, I secretly listened to an outside radio broadcast. In the voice coming from that small radio, I heard about a world where human beings could live with dignity." That experience, though dangerous, sparked a process of questioning and ultimately led to escape. The speaker concluded with a powerful insight: "Information is the starting point of change. I am living proof of that."

This emphasis on information as a catalyst for transformation was echoed across multiple testimonies. Another participant described ongoing efforts to send leaflets and media content into North Korea despite significant personal risk, explaining that "the North Korean regime fears truth more than guns, and it fears outside information more than missiles." These accounts painted a critical tension: while military and economic strategies dominate international discourse, it is often the quiet flow of information that has the most profound impact on individuals within closed societies.

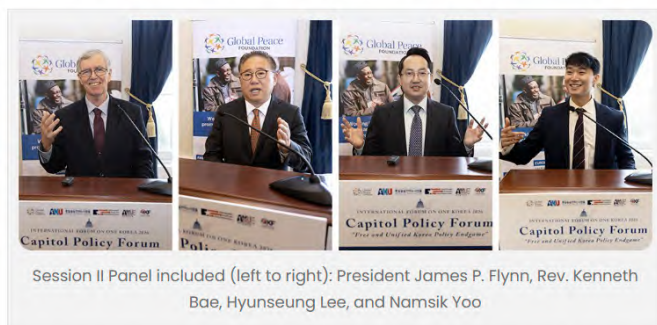
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Speakers also raised concerns about the limitations of traditional humanitarian aid. One escapee recounted witnessing how aid intended for vulnerable populations was often diverted by authorities. "If aid does not actually reach the people, it can end up being used to maintain and strengthen the North Korean regime," they warned, urging the international community to rethink delivery mechanisms to ensure assistance reaches those most in need.

Perhaps one of the most striking testimonies came from a former kindergarten teacher, who described the systemic indoctrination of children from an early age. "In kindergarten, the first thing children learn is not play, but loyalty and obedience," she said, recounting how even basic education was subordinated to political messaging. Her appeal was both urgent and deeply human: "Children are not objects of politics; they are the owners of the future."

The second panel shifted from testimony to strategy, examining the role of the U.S.-ROK alliance for a free and unified Korea and the broader international community. Moderator Ms. Olivia Enos, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute who specializes in human rights and national security challenges in Asia, challenged the prevailing assumption that security concerns alone define the alliance, arguing instead that shared values are equally foundational. "Our shared commitment to defending human rights and values is a strength, not a weakness," she said, reframing human rights as integral to long-term stability.



Mr. James P. Flynn, international president of the Global Peace Foundation, introduced the concept of the "Korean Dream," a unifying vision rooted in the ancient Korean ethos of Hongik Ingan, meaning living for the greater benefit of humanity. He argued that unification must be understood as renewal. "Unification is not absorption; it is the building of a new nation grounded in freedom and human dignity," he explained. At the same time, he warned against settling for incremental solutions that fail to address root causes. "Policy discourse is drifting toward 'cold peace,' but that is adaptation to failure, not a resolution."

Reverend Kenneth Bae, founder and president of New Korea Foundation International and New Korea Hope Broadcasting, brought a sense of urgency to the discussion, drawing from his experience as a former prisoner in North Korea. He described worsening conditions, including food shortages and severe punishment for those attempting to escape.

“Survival rates in these prisons are less than 30%. We are hearing reports of people starving to death,” he said, painting a stark picture of the humanitarian crisis. His conclusion was unequivocal: “The time for reunification is now. It is the only way for the people to be free and live with human dignity.”

Mr. Hyunseung Lee, another North Korean escapee and lead program strategist of the North Korea Initiative at Global Peace Foundation and program director of the North Korean Young Leaders Assembly, offered a critical assessment of longstanding U.S. policy. “The U.S. has operated under the slogan of ‘managing the threat,’ but that just gave the regime time to perfect its nuclear arsenal,” he argued. Calling for a more decisive approach, he added, “We must stop trimming the branches and address the source.” His remarks reflected a broader consensus that incremental management strategies have failed to produce meaningful change.

Namsik Yoo, director of Youth Programs at Alliance for Korea United-USA, reinforced the moral dimension of the issue, describing unification as more than a policy goal. “Reunification is a moral imperative,” he said, highlighting the role of youth and diaspora communities in building a grassroots movement for change. The panel discussion and subsequent Q&A further emphasized the effectiveness of information dissemination, with speakers noting that a majority of North Korean refugees had accessed outside media before escaping. “Out of 35,000 North Korean refugees, more than 60% of them heard radio programming before they escaped,” Reverend Bae shared, emphasizing the transformative power of truth.



Ambassador Robert Joseph, keynote speaker at the International Forum on One Korea 2026

Ambassador Robert Joseph, senior scholar at the National Institute for Public

Policy and former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, brought decades of policy experience to the discussion. He delivered a clear critique of the prevailing approach to North Korea, stating that “diplomacy focused solely on denuclearization has failed and continues to fail.” He argued that the core issue lies not only in weapons development but also in the regime itself, which depends on both nuclear capability and systemic human rights abuses. “The Kim regime has at its core the belief that its very survival is based on the twin pillars of nuclear weapons and horrific human rights denial,” he explained.

Ambassador Joseph called for a fundamental shift

in strategy, positioning unification as the most viable path forward. “A unified and free Korea is not some distant aspirational goal, but the best and perhaps only viable means to ending the security threat,” he said, urging policymakers to integrate human rights into security frameworks and support civil society-led efforts.

The forum concluded with a special presentation by Inteck Seo, co-



Action for Korea United Co-chair Inteck Seo

chair of Action for Korea United, who clearly articulated the “One Korea” message at the heart of the forum. He rejected North Korea’s “two states” theory and called instead for a single, free, and unified nation. Seo argued that decades of alternating sanctions and negotiations have not fully addressed the root of the North Korean issue: the continued division of the Korean Peninsula and the absence of freedom for the North Korean people. Presenting the Korean Dream, rooted in the spirit of *Hongik Ingan*, as a shared vision that rises above ideology and factionalism, he emphasized that peaceful unification must be led by Korean civil society, with support from the United States and the international community. He also stressed that expanding access to truth and offering a hopeful vision of freedom to the North Korean people are essential to building a Korean-led path toward peaceful reunification.

Across all sessions, the forum made it unmistakably clear that lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying issues of human rights and systemic repression. As one escapee poignantly stated, “A free and unified Korea is a concrete goal that we must build together.”

The forum’s call to action aligns with the broader vision of the One Korea Global Campaign, led by the Global Peace Foundation, which seeks to advance peaceful reunification through values-based, people-centered engagement across nations. As momentum builds, individuals and institutions alike are invited to take part in shaping this future by lending their voice and support. You can stand with this vision by signing your support for the Korean Dream through the [Korean Dream 10 Million Campaign](#) and contributing to ongoing efforts that promote freedom, human rights, and unity on the Korean Peninsula by supporting [One Korea Global Campaign initiatives](#). Together, these collective actions help move the goal of a free and unified Korea from aspiration to reality.

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*Robert Joseph, Nicholas Eberstadt, James Flynn,
Hyun-seung Lee, Michael Marshall, David Maxwell,
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Source, No. 658, April 27, 2026*

Toward a Free and Unified Korea—Resolving the Korea Challenge at Its Source

Robert Joseph chaired the Free and Unified Korea working group that developed the findings, conclusions and policy recommendations contained in this report. The other members of the working group were Nicholas Eberstadt, James Flynn, Hyun-seung Lee, Michael Marshall, David Maxwell, and Greg Scarlatoiu.

Executive Summary

The division of the Korean Peninsula is one of the most critical unresolved legacies of World War II. What was intended as a temporary administrative line hardened into a permanent geopolitical fault line. More than 70 years after the Korean War, the peninsula remains divided between a thriving South and an impoverished, totalitarian, nuclear-armed regime in the North.

This paper presents the findings and recommendations of the Free and Unified Korea (FAUK) working group. It argues that a free and unified Korea is not a distant or speculative ambition. Rather, it represents the only durable pathway to eliminating the nuclear threat, protecting human rights, and completing the unfinished work of Korean independence.

For three decades, U.S. and international policy toward North Korea has centered narrowly on denuclearization. Yet North Korea's nuclear arsenal continues to expand rapidly, its missile capabilities have advanced dramatically, and its human rights abuses remain systemic and severe. The underlying national security and humanitarian challenges of the peninsula cannot be resolved without addressing the structural reality of division itself.

Re-establishing unification as the strategic end state of U.S.-ROK policy requires moving beyond the limitations of a denuclearization-first paradigm and adopting a comprehensive framework that incorporates security, human rights, economic integration, and civil society engagement. It also requires preparing responsibly for potential political change on the peninsula and confronting persistent myths that portray unification as either impossible or prohibitively costly.

A unified Korea—democratic, nuclear-free, economically integrated, and grounded in a shared historical identity—would advance long-term U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific and fulfill the aspirations of the Korean people.

The Unfinished Korea Question

The division of Korea in 1945 was not an expression of Korean self-determination or political choice. It was imposed by the victorious powers at the end of World War II. The dividing line at the 38th parallel was intended as a temporary military demarcation. Instead, it became the defining fracture of modern Korean history.

The Korean independence movement of 1919 was not simply anti-colonial; it was also aspirational. It called for a unified, sovereign nation grounded in universal principles of freedom and equality. Contemporary initiatives such as the modern Korean Dream movement and the civil society coalition Action for Korea United (AKU) draw on that legacy as the basis for a comprehensive national vision for a unified Korea.^[1]

On the 80th anniversary of Korea's 1945 liberation, AKU founder and author of the seminal book, "Korean Dream," Dr. Hyun Jin Preston Moon noted that the aspirations of the independence movement remained unfulfilled. Korea was liberated, but not unified—*independent, but not whole.*^[2]

The consequences of division remain profound. The peninsula continues to host one of the most dangerous security environments in the world, combining nuclear weapons, unresolved military confrontation, and a system of political repression unmatched in scale.

The result is a divided and dangerous peninsula that continues to include:

- A nuclear-armed regime in Pyongyang;

- An unresolved armistice in place of peace;
- A persistent risk of regional escalation;
- Systematic crimes against humanity in the North.

For the United States, the Korea question is not peripheral. It was the first armed conflict of the Cold War. The U.S.-ROK alliance that emerged from it has become a cornerstone of regional stability. But the conflict itself remains structurally unresolved.

Why Denuclearization Alone Has Failed

For over 30 years, U.S. and international diplomacy have focused overwhelmingly on the “denuclearization” of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. It has been the highest priority and often the only priority. Agreements were reached, violated, renegotiated, and abandoned. Yet throughout this period Pyongyang’s nuclear capabilities continued to expand at an accelerating rate.

Underlying this approach was the belief that the magnitude and urgency of the nuclear threat required placing denuclearization above all other concerns. Issues such as human rights, internal political change, and the long-term future of the Korean Peninsula were treated as secondary matters to be addressed later.

The record of the past three decades demonstrates the failure of the denuclearization first policy. Negotiations that focus narrowly on nuclear weapons cannot succeed when the weapons themselves are central to the regime’s survival strategy. For the Kim regime, nuclear weapons provide deterrence, coercive leverage, domestic legitimacy, and international recognition.

As a result, denuclearization negotiations have repeatedly failed because they attempt to separate the nuclear issue from the nature of the regime that possesses the weapons. The regime’s political structure and its nuclear arsenal are inseparable.

The 2023 report, “National Strategy for Countering North Korea,” published by the National Institute for Public Policy (NIPP), similarly concluded that the current policy framework has been fundamentally misaligned with the strategic realities of the peninsula. It argued that the focus on arms control and negotiations has obscured the deeper issue: the persistence of a totalitarian regime that prioritizes regime survival above economic development, human rights, or international stability.^[3]

The lesson is clear. Durable denuclearization will not occur unless the political structure that generates the nuclear threat changes. A comprehensive strategy must therefore address the broader question of the peninsula’s future.

Unification is not an alternative to security policy and denuclearization. It is the completion of it.

The Korean Dream: Historical and Cultural Foundations

A sustainable unification strategy must incorporate both geopolitical and cultural dimensions. The Korean Dream framework situates unification within Korea’s founding ethos of *Hongik Ingan*, often translated as “living for the greater benefit of humanity.”

This ideal, embedded in Korea’s origin narrative, has historically served as a unifying moral compass across regional, political, and ideological divides. It parallels universal principles articulated in democratic founding documents and reflects Korea’s long civilizational continuity.

The appropriate framework therefore presents unification not as absorption or conquest, but as the fulfillment of an interrupted national mission. It emphasizes shared heritage across North, South, and the global Korean diaspora and envisions a unified Korea rooted in democratic values and civic participation.

This cultural grounding is essential. Unification framed solely as a security imperative cannot generate the broad societal support necessary for long-term success. Framed instead as historical completion and national renewal, it becomes a project capable of mobilizing citizens across generations.

Civil society plays a central role in implementing this vision, transforming principles into practice. Broad-based coalitions such as Action for Korea United demonstrate how grassroots engagement can revitalize unification discourse even amid public apathy. Government policy can create enabling conditions, but lasting legitimacy must come from society itself. For this reason, unification must ultimately be Korean-led and civil society-grounded.

Confronting the Myths That Impede Unification

A series of persistent myths has discouraged serious strategic planning for Korean unification.

Myth 1: Unification Will Trigger War

Critics argue that pursuing unification risks regime collapse, civil war, and uncontrolled proliferation of nuclear weapons. Yet the current system itself carries substantial instability risks. A brittle totalitarian dictatorship armed with nuclear weapons and governed by opaque succession dynamics cannot be considered a stable long-term equilibrium.

Responsible planning to move toward unification reduces risk by preparing for potential contingencies. Avoiding planning simply increases the dangers associated with sudden change.

Myth 2: China Will Never Allow It

Another common but dubious claim is that China would categorically oppose Korean unification under a democratic government. While Beijing’s interests must be considered, permanent acceptance of a destabilizing buffer state is not the only strategic option.

A carefully managed transition accompanied by diplomatic engagement and clear deterrence considerations could address many of China’s concerns while preserving the broader stability of the region.

Myth 3: A Unified Korea Would Drift from the United States

Some analysts suggest that Korean nationalism could lead a unified Korea to distance itself from the United States. In reality, a Korea that achieves unity with sustained international support is likely to value those alliances that helped secure its sovereignty. Simply put, there is no feasible security alternative to the U.S.-led alliance system if a unified Korea is to

flourish and thrive. Without active involvement and deep integration in the U.S.-led international security architecture, a unified Korea cannot succeed, economically or politically.

Shared achievement tends to strengthen, rather than weaken, strategic partnerships.

Myth 4: Unification Is Too Expensive

Economic fears are among the most powerful obstacles to public support for unification. Comparisons to German reunification often dominate public debate. However, South Korea today is one of the world's most advanced economies, with private wealth estimated at roughly \$10 trillion. Global capital markets contain tens of trillions of dollars seeking productive investment opportunities.

With careful institutional design, infrastructure investment, and international participation, the reconstruction of North Korea can generate substantial economic returns rather than unsustainable fiscal burdens.

Myth 5: North Koreans Will Not Accept Freedom

Some assume that North Korean society is too isolated or politically conditioned to adapt to democratic institutions. Yet the experience of defectors and escapees demonstrates remarkable adaptability, resilience, and entrepreneurial energy once individuals are exposed to open societies.

Modern history repeatedly shows that populations long subject to authoritarian rule can rapidly embrace political and economic freedom when given the opportunity.

National Security Imperatives^[4]

From a national security perspective, the persistence of the Kim regime presents enduring risks not only for the Korean Peninsula but for the broader Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

North Korea's military posture, combined with its nuclear and missile capabilities, create the constant possibility of miscalculation or escalation. At the same time, the regime's internal fragility raises concerns about instability and the security of its weapons of mass destruction.

Security experts such as David Maxwell have emphasized that long-term stability on the peninsula will ultimately depend on internal transformation within North Korea. Efforts to expand information access, support North Korean civil society networks, and encourage internal change can help create the conditions for peaceful transformation.

Preparing for political change is therefore a central national security requirement. Such preparation should include contingency planning for stabilizing the peninsula in the event of regime collapse, securing nuclear, chemical and biological materials, and coordinating closely with allies.

A unified Korea would eliminate one of the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoints while strengthening the strategic architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

Economic Transformation as Strategic Opportunity^[5]

The economic case for unification is frequently misunderstood. North Korea's poverty reflects catastrophic policy choices rather than inherent economic incapacity. Decades of isolation, centralized planning, and military prioritization have produced widespread deprivation despite the population's high literacy rates and strong cultural emphasis on education.

Economic analyses by scholars such as Nicholas Eberstadt emphasize that North Korea's economic failure is primarily the result of systemic policy mismanagement rather than a lack of human potential or natural resources. The North's labor force, natural resources, and geographic position represent significant latent economic assets. North Koreans are Koreans, but their talent, drive and enterprise are shackled. Their potential is widely underestimated today, just as that of South Koreans before the ROK's economic takeoff.

The reconstruction of North Korea should therefore be understood not as a purely humanitarian project but as a long-term development opportunity. Infrastructure modernization, energy grid revitalization, and integration into regional supply chains could generate substantial economic growth.

For the United States and its allies, a unified Korea would strengthen trusted supply chains in semiconductors, batteries, shipbuilding, and advanced manufacturing. It would reduce vulnerability to economic coercion and expand opportunities for regional economic cooperation.

Unification should therefore be understood not as the transfer of wealth from South to North, but as a process of strategic economic integration that benefits all Koreans.

Human Rights and Strategic Legitimacy^[6]

Human rights concerns in North Korea have too often been subordinated to short-term diplomatic priorities, particularly nuclear negotiations. Systematic repression is not incidental—it is central to its structure and a pillar of the regime's survival.

Human rights advocates such as Greg Scarlatoiu have emphasized that raising awareness of the regime's abuses is essential both morally and strategically. Expanding information access, documenting crimes against humanity, and supporting the voices of North Korean defectors help undermine the regime's monopoly on information.

Elevating human rights within policy planning strengthens internal awareness within North Korea while aligning international policy with democratic values.

Supporting North Korean voices abroad, promoting information flows into the country, and ensuring accountability for crimes against humanity can reinforce both moral credibility and long-term strategic effectiveness.

Policy Actions for U.S. and Allied Decision-Makers

Given the strategic, economic, and moral case for unification, the Free and Unified Korea working group recommends that policymakers take the following steps:

1. Officially define unification as the strategic end state.

U.S. and ROK policy documents should explicitly identify free and unified Korea as the primary objective. Ideally, with

U.S. and ROK policy documents should explicitly identify a free and unified Korea as the primary objective, ideally with Japan's support, building on the 2023 Camp David trilateral agreement.^[vii]

2. Integrate human rights into security strategy.

Human rights advocacy should be incorporated into broader policy planning rather than treated as a separate and secondary diplomatic track.

3. Establish a joint transition planning mechanism.

The United States and South Korea should create a standing body responsible for contingency planning related to WMD security, humanitarian response, and economic integration.

4. Strengthen civil society engagement.

Governments should provide support to Korean-led civic initiatives that promote dialogue and preparation for unification.

5. Counter myths through public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy initiatives should address misconceptions about unification by highlighting updated economic modeling and strategic analysis.

6. Engage regional stakeholders.

Diplomatic channels should be maintained with China and other regional actors to reduce misunderstanding and manage potential transition scenarios.

7. Prepare financial architecture.

International financial institutions should begin contingency planning to identify mechanisms that can facilitate investment and reconstruction in a unified Korea.

Conclusion: From Crisis Management to Resolution

For decades, U.S. policy has focused on managing the Korean challenge—deterring conflict, maintaining alliance cohesion, and responding to periodic crises. But management is not resolution. The structural anomaly of division remains. The nuclear threat continues to expand. The human rights crisis continues. These conditions represent not a stable equilibrium but a continuing source of strategic risk.

A free and unified Korea offers a path toward durable peace, regional stability, and the fulfillment of the Korean people's longstanding aspiration for unity and freedom. The Korea question remains unfinished. It is time to approach it not merely as a recurring crisis to be managed and contained, but as a historic challenge to be resolved.

Nicholas Eberstadt, Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Senior Advisor to the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), and a Founding Director of Staff HRNK, the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

James P. Flynn, International President of the Global Peace Foundation (GPF), leading initiatives across more than 20 countries to advance values-based peacebuilding and ethical leadership development.

Robert Joseph, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Senior Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy and a member of the Board of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

Hyun-seung Lee is a North Korean escapee, former Special Forces soldier, and lead strategist at the Global Peace Foundation, and founder of the North Korean Young Leaders Assembly.

Michael Marshall, Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of United Press International.

David Maxwell, Vice President, Center for Asia Pacific Strategy, retired U.S. Army Special Forces Colonel. He has spent more than 30 years in Asia as a practitioner and specializes in North Korea and East Asian Security Affairs, and irregular, unconventional, and political warfare.

Greg Scarlatoiu, President and CEO of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), President of the International Council on Korean Studies (ICKS), and a Visiting Professor at Yonsei University.

[1] Action for Korea United, https://aku.kr/sub/business_1.php.

[2] Moon, Hyun Jin Preston, *Korean Dream: A Vision for a Unified Korea*, Centennial ed. (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2020), <https://koreandream.org/>.

[3] Robert Joseph, et al., "A National Strategy for Countering North Korea," *Information Series*, No. 545 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, January 23, 2023), <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Joseph-et-al-Analysis.pdf>.

[4] David Maxwell, *Reviewing American north Korean Policy—three decades of failure*, UPI, March 26, 2026, <https://www.upi.com/Korea-Regional-Review/Original-Research/Reviewing-American-north-Korean-Policy-three-decades-of-failure>.

[5] Nicholas Eberstadt, *The Economics of Korean Re-unification: Thinking the Unthinkable?* (AEI Foreign & Defense Policy Working Paper 2024-03), American Enterprise Institute, June 2024, <https://aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Eberstadt-Working-Paper-6.11.24.pdf>.

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[7] The White House, *The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States*, August 18, 2023, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/camp-david-principles/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

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The International Forum on One Korea: Capitol Policy Forum Gallery

Global Peace Foundation

May 5, 2026



Forum participants

Greetings and welcoming



Session I speakers

Session I speakers included (left to right): Dr. Suzanne Scholte (moderator), Kang-II Hu, Ji-Young Kim, Sang-Hak Park and Ga-Young Kim



Jeremy Graham

Jeremy Graham, GPF director of Strategic Development



Kang Il-Hu

Kang Il-Hu, chairman of North Korea Democratization Committee



Forum participants

Audience taking notes



Jiyoung Kim

Jiyoung Kim, president of Free North Korea Radio



Sang Hak Park

Sang Hak Park, head of Fighters for a Free North Korea



Gayoung Kim

Gayoung Kim, broadcaster and security lecturer



Dr. Suzanne Scholte and Namsik Yoo

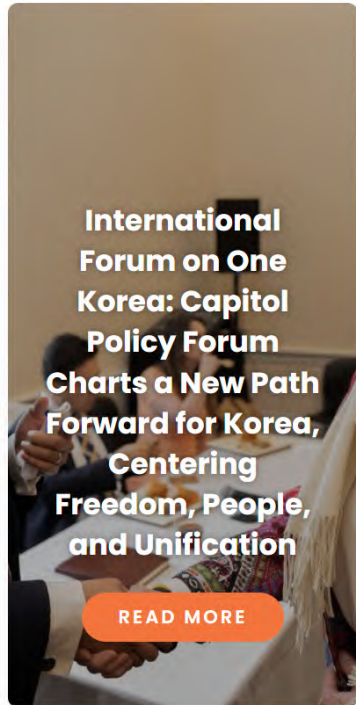
Dr. Suzanne Scholte (left), president of Defense Forum Foundation and Namsik Yoo (right), director of Youth Programs, AKU-USA



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James P. Flynn

GPF International
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Flynn



Session II Speakers

(From left to right):
Rev. Kenneth Bae,
Hyunseung Lee,
Namsik Yoo



Capitol Policy Forum

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Reverend Kenneth Bae

Rev. Kenneth Bae,
Founder and
President, New
Korea Foundation
International and
New Korea Hope
Broadcasting



Hyunseung Lee

Hyunseung Lee,
founder of North
Korean Young
Leaders Assembly,
speaking at the
Capitol Policy
Forum



Olivia Enos and Ambassador Robert Joseph

Olivia Enos, senior
fellow at the
Hudson Institute,
and Ambassador
Robert Joseph



Ambassador Robert Joseph

Former Under
Secretary of State
for Arms Control
and International
Security,
Ambassador
Robert Joseph



Inteck Seo

Action for Korea
United Co-chair
Inteck Seo



Greetings

Rev. Kenneth Bae
with Amb Robert
Joseph and
President James P.
Flynn

The International Forum on One Korea: Capitol Policy Forum, held on April 29, 2026, at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C., brought together policymakers, experts, civil society leaders, and North Korean escapees to examine a bold shift in strategy for addressing the Korean Peninsula. Convened by the Global Peace Foundation (GPF), alongside partners including Action for Korea United, Defense Forum Foundation, Alliance for Korea United USA, and One Korea Foundation, the forum challenged decades of policy centered narrowly on denuclearization and instead advanced a comprehensive vision of a free and unified Korea grounded in human dignity and freedom.

Held during North Korea Freedom Week under the theme "Free and Unified Korea Policy Endgame," the forum set out to elevate voices that are often marginalized in policy discussions: those of North Korean escapees.

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“A Better World Is Coming”: Reverend Kenneth Bae Calls for Renewed Global Attention to North Korean Human Rights

Wairimu Mwangi
May 3, 2026

At North Korea Freedom Week in Washington, D.C. in late April, 2026, Reverend Kenneth Bae, founder and president of New Korea Foundation International and New Korea Hope Broadcasting delivered a message of urgency, hope, and global responsibility regarding the worsening human rights crisis in North Korea. Speaking during an interview held alongside the week-long advocacy events, Bae reflected on his years of humanitarian engagement following his detention in North Korea and called for renewed international attention to the suffering of ordinary North Koreans.

For more than a decade since his release, Rev. Bae has worked closely with North Korean defectors and humanitarian initiatives while advocating for improved human rights conditions inside the country. Yet despite years of diplomatic engagements, inter-Korean dialogue, and summit meetings involving world leaders, he observed that little has changed for the North Korean people.

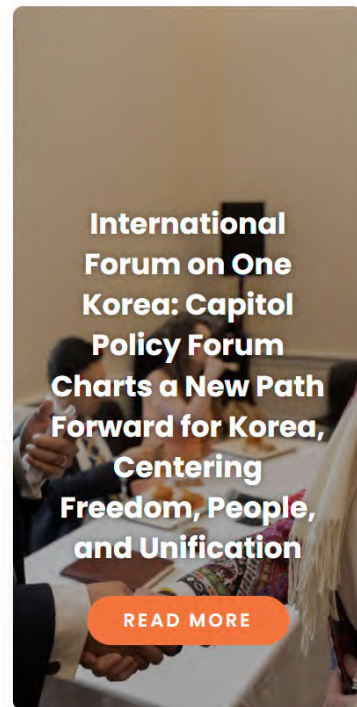
“There have been no reports indicating that the situation has improved,” Rev. Bae said. “I feel that there has been very little actual change regarding human rights or the daily lives of the North Korean people.”

Instead, reports indicate that conditions have become increasingly severe. Bae pointed to alarming economic realities as evidence of deepening hardship. According to accounts he recently received, exchange rates in North Korea’s informal markets have skyrocketed

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dramatically, while staple food prices such as rice have reportedly tripled within the past year. To him, these developments signal not only economic collapse but also intensifying suffering for ordinary citizens already living under strict state control.

While the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen, Rev. Bae emphasized that access to outside information remains one of the most important lifelines available to the people of North Korea. He explained that information allows individuals to better understand the outside world, regain hope, and begin imagining a different future for themselves and their families.

“By facilitating the inflow of information, the North Korean people can become aware of the reality themselves and gain a better understanding of the outside world,” he said, “even if it doesn’t lead to an immediate improvement in human rights, it could at least empower them to dream again on their own terms.”

Rev. Bae also shared insights from recent discussions on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers and advocates voiced concern that decades have passed with little improvement in North Korean human rights. He welcomed renewed calls for stronger advocacy, including efforts to reauthorize the North Korean Human Rights Act and encourage governments to speak more boldly on behalf of those whose voices are silenced.

A central focus of Rev. Bae’s work today is broadcasting hope directly into North Korea through New Korea Hope Broadcasting. Inspired by the hundreds of letters he received while imprisoned, messages assuring him that he had not been forgotten, Rev. Bae launched shortwave broadcasts featuring news, practical information, faith-based programming, and a special segment called “Letters of Hope.” These letters, submitted by people around the world, are read aloud for North Korean listeners to hear.

Many of the messages carry a common theme: “A better world is coming.”

For Rev. Bae, these broadcasts are about more than information. They are about restoring hope, emotional healing, and human connection to people living in deep isolation. Reflecting on the encouragement he received during his imprisonment, he explained how those messages became the inspiration behind the broadcasts.

“As I read and reread those letters, they became my lifeline, a thread of hope that sustained me,” he shared.

The interview concluded with Rev. Bae offering words of encouragement to the people of North Korea, assuring them that people across the

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world remember them, pray for them, and continue to stand in solidarity with their pursuit of freedom and dignity. He expressed hope for a future where Koreans can live together in freedom, peace, and reconciliation.

As efforts continue to support human rights, peacebuilding, and reunification on the Korean Peninsula, individuals and organizations around the world are being encouraged to join the One Korea Global Campaign, an international movement advancing the vision of a free, unified, and peaceful Korea grounded in universal principles of freedom, human rights, and shared prosperity.

Learn more and support the campaign through [One Korea Global Campaign](#).

Watch the original interview video in Korean, with English auto-dub available, to hear Rev. Bae's full reflections on hope, human rights, and the future of a free Korea.



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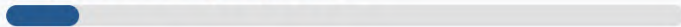
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– Hyunseung Lee, NKYLA Founder

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