



## Asia Pacific leadership Network PRESS RELEASE

### *Immediate Release*

### DPRK and Covid-19

*A new special report by Professor Shin Young-jeon explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).*

*Tokyo, Seoul, Wednesday 3 March 2021*

A new [Special Report](#) by Professor Shin Young-jeon published on 3 March 2021 assesses how the DPRK was impacted by COVID-19, evaluates its response to the pandemic, and offers a range of policy recommendations for the two Koreas and the international community.

In response to large-scale epidemic threats such as SARS, measles, swine flu, Ebola and MERS, the DPRK imposed strict measures including border blocking, strengthening disinfection, and enhanced quarantine measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has more severely affected the regime given the lack of help in the early stages of the pandemic, UN-US sanctions blocking quarantine supplies, and Pyongyang refusing help from Seoul.

Despite the challenging circumstances, the DPRK's strongly centralized state and systematic anti-epidemic structure, active and prompt decision-making, strict enforcement and systematic and extensive propaganda activities have, for now, been able to keep the situation under control.

But the pandemic cannot be addressed by one country alone. To effectively respond to the pandemic more must be done. The Special Report offers several actionable recommendations including:

- **Maintaining stable management of the COVID-19 epidemic:** So long as the Covid-19 epidemic continues, the DPRK should place high priority on securing sufficient food, diagnostic and protective equipment, and treatment facilities necessary for its Covid-19 response. Doing so will be impossible under strong economic sanctions of the United States and the international community. Thus, the DPRK's first step is to

establish a more open and cooperative relationship with the international community, including the ROK.

- **Increasing need to strengthen quarantine for resumption of international trade and tourism:** Despite the sanctions, there are measures the DPRK can take to ease or withdraw the border closures and to operate more active trade in goods and services such as tourism. In principle, tourism is not subject to economic sanctions, but tourists are unlikely to come amid Covid-19 uncertainty. It is thus necessary to establish an even stronger quarantine system and a more specialized international cooperation system with neighboring countries.
- **Improving inter-Korean relations and expansion of exchanges:** The DPRK should change its hostile attitude towards the ROK government and resume exchanges with the existing ROK non-governmental organizations for cooperation. The ROK should also fulfil its existing promises made with the DPRK regarding the Kaesong Industrial Complex. To resume inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation it will be necessary to first resume the tasks promised by the two Koreas.
- **Expanding transparency and accuracy of information related to COVID-19 and international exchange:** Rather than claiming that there are no COVID-19 patients because this might be used by external adversaries as a weakness to exploit, the DPRK government should secure a system that enables rapid and rational response by creating a more detailed and accurate real-time surveillance system, publishing statistics, and actively exchanging professional information internationally.
- **Humanitarian exchange and cooperation between DPRK and ROK:** The ROK government needs to make an independent decision or to obtain comprehensive approval from the United Nations humanitarian exchanges between the two Koreas.
- **Establishing the NAQHC:** It is necessary to establish a multilateral Northeast Asian quarantine network including China, Japan, and Mongolia, which integrates and expands on the existing inter-Korean quarantine cooperation structure. For this purpose, the ROK government should first persuade the governments of China, Japan, and Mongolia to establish a cooperative network and allow the DPRK to enter within this multilateral structure.
- **Implementing the North Korean exchange project with the COVAX facility and other international organizations:** The ROK government should more actively try to promote health projects on the Korean Peninsula through international organizations and find a way to secure financial and technical resources.
- **Conclusion of the South-North Health Agreement:** In the event of joint response and cooperation between the ROK and the DPRK against infectious diseases such as Covid-19 becomes realistic, the South and North Korean health care agreements must be signed to prevent such cooperation from becoming temporary.

- **China's role as a mediator:** China should strengthen its mediating role in exchange and cooperation between the ROK and the DPRK. China should also participate in the establishment of the NAQHC and play a more active role in compelling the DPRK to participate in it.
- **Changing US policy towards the DPRK:** To reduce the DPRK's dependence on China, the U.S. should (1) move away from enmity and to provide conditions for the DPRK's own strength by easing and ultimately withdrawing sanctions and (2) help promote economic exchanges between the ROK and the DPRK.

## ENDS

### Notes for Editors

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This paper was presented to the 75th Anniversary Nagasaki Nuclear-Pandemic Nexus Scenario Project co-sponsored by the Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA), the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN), and Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, in cooperation with the Nagasaki University Planetary Health Project and the Panel on Peace and Security of Northeast Asia (PSNA).

**The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** has ninety-three members from sixteen countries across Asia and the Pacific, consisting of former political, diplomatic and military leaders, senior government officials, and scholars and opinion leaders. As an advocacy group, the APLN aims to inform and energise public opinion, especially high-level policymakers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and eventually eliminated.

#### **Nautilus Institute**

The Nautilus Institute hold that it is possible to build peace, create security, and restore sustainability for all people in our time. To this end, we convene a community of scholars and practitioners who conduct research on strategies to solve interconnected global problems. With networks of partners, we develop and apply these strategies to the linked threats of nuclear war, urban and energy insecurity, and climate change in the Asia Pacific region. We encourage civil society to strengthen regional governance of these common problems and shared Solutions.

#### **Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA)**

Nagasaki University is the only university in the world that has inherited a medical college having experienced the atomic bombing. Achieving a "world free from nuclear weapons" is thus a paramount concern to the University. Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA), located in a city that was attacked by an atomic

bomb, is an educational and research institute which is the interdisciplinary center of local academia with a firsthand experience of the horror of nuclear weapons.