

Outcomes and Significance of the 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial

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The 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, co-hosted by the Ministry of National Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (ROK), was successfully held for two days in Seoul on December 7-8. The UN Peacekeeping Ministerial is the largest and highest-level inter-governmental conference on UN peacekeeping operations. Though originally planned to be held in-person, the meeting had to take place virtually with foreign and defense ministerial-level representatives from 82 countries participating online to prevent the spread of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus. Nevertheless, the conference provided a meaningful opportunity to express the international community's collective commitment to the world peace.

Being the first country in Asia to host the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial is particularly meaningful for our country as we have painfully learned the value of peace, overcoming tragic history of the Korean War. By quickly rebuilding a war-torn Korea, we have transformed ourselves from a recipient country of ODA to a significant donor. Since joining the UN in 1991, the ROK has participated in UN's peacekeeping operations by contributing about 19,000 troops to various missions, beginning with the first deployment of peacekeepers to Somalia in 1993. In addition, the ROK has become the 10th- largest financial contributor to the UN peace operations. Today, the Dongmyeong unit in Lebanon and the Hanbit unit in South Sudan have not only succeeded in their missions of reconnaissance and post-conflict reconstruction but have also

supported the local community, thereby earning the respect as exemplary peacekeeping forces from the UN and their host countries.

The 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, held on the 30th anniversary of the ROK's membership to the UN, served as an important milestone at which the ROK's past PKO activities were revisited, current operations were reviewed, and the paths forward for the future were explored. On the occasion of this event, the ROK sought to expand our scope of contributions to world peace beyond the conventional methods of troop deployments and financial contribution to include the transfer of technology and assets. As the host nation, the ROK announced the 'Seoul Initiative' that called for the strengthening of technology and medical capacity building in peacekeeping. The Seoul Initiative reflects our sincere commitment to contribute to the prevention and management of violence in conflict areas around the world, while also encouraging the international community to join this effort.

Under the main theme of "Technology and Medical Capacity Building," the 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial consisted of four sessions. Session I titled 'Sustaining Peace' was chaired by Minister of Foreign Affairs Chung Eui-yong and discussed methods of strengthening the role of peacekeeping forces to foster mid- to long-term peace. Minister Chung reiterated the importance of planning peacekeeping operations aimed at sustaining peace from the early stage of peacekeeping missions; and enhancing cooperation across the humanitarian assistance, development, and peace sectors in order to achieve a long-term sustainable peace.

In session II, titled 'Partnership, Training and Capacity Building', Minister of National Defense Suh Wook participated as a keynote speaker. Minister Suh proposed partnership-based capacity building and contribution of enabling assets such as helicopters as specific ways to increase the effectiveness of PKO in complex security environments. His suggestions drew support from many participating countries.

Meanwhile, sessions III and IV held on the second day of the conference discussed 'Performance and Accountability' and 'Protection of Civilians and Safety & Security', respectively. Participants discussed various ways aimed at practically improving the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions, including building medical capacity and expanding training.

Non-traditional and trans-border threats such as new pandemics, climate change, and cyber terror affect international peacekeeping missions. In particular, peacekeepers serving under the UN flag now operate in far more dangerous, complex and high-risk environments. Against this backdrop, Minister Suh stressed that partnership-based capacity building is imperative to successfully deliver mandates in such complex security environments. He also presented the ROK government's six pledges to improve peacekeeping: running a pilot project on UN smart camps, deploying a medical support team to South Sudan, offer engineering and demining training courses, providing helicopter assets, organizing and offering female officer training courses, and deploying additional police force.

In particular, UN smart camps, which utilizes our strengths in information and communication technology (ICT) aimed at improving the poor conditions at existing basecamps into safer, more effective, and environmentally-friendlier ones in the future, have received considerable attention and support from the UN and the participating countries. As a staunch supporter of UN peacekeeping activities, the ROK government emphasized its commitment to implementing follow-up measures on each initiative, including the pilot projects for the smart camps at the Hanbit unit and the deployment of medical training teams. In this way, the ROK will continue to do one's best so as to make a tangible difference on the grounds.

Meanwhile, some countries presented their concrete pledges based on one's capabilities and situations. For example, Kenya promised to deploy a new helicopter unit, string along with the ROK. The US representative to the UN expressed her intention to financially support the partnership between Kenya and the ROK to provide helicopter assets. Member states showed strong support for the 'Seoul Initiative,' acknowledging the ROK's active contributions to improving technology and medical capacity building. Participants agreed that strengthening these capacities are essential to effectively and efficiently addressing the challenges that peacekeepers face and to protect the safety of peacekeeping missions in the field. They renewed commitment towards improving the performance of PKO missions.

On the occasion of this event, a special public exhibition titled 'United for Peace, Together for a Better Future' took place from December 3 to 12 at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) that displayed the past, present, and future of UN peacekeeping operations. The exhibition consisted of four exhibits that introduced peacekeeping operations to the people of South Korea as well as our various and consistent

contributions to these efforts: the UN Peacekeeping operations (PKO) hall, the UN smart camp hall, the Peace on the Korean Peninsula hall, and the PKO equipment hall. In particular, the exhibit on UN smart camps that suggest the future of the UN by applying South Korea's advanced information and communications technology was a great opportunity to demonstrate how the ROK is at the center of the world's efforts towards global peace. In addition, the Korean Peninsula peace hall demonstrated South Korea's hope that our efforts to heal the wounds from war and to establish peace on the Korean peninsula would spread to the entire world, thereby providing an opportunity for the citizen to recognize the value of peace.

Peace is not free. Since we have overcome the painful history of division and continue on our path towards establishing permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula, the ROK is an ideal country that can symbolize these experiences to share with the rest of the world. In other words, the ROK's experience will give them hope that a peaceful and prosperous future is within their reach. As the host nation of the 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, we hope that this year's conference leads to substantive changes to peacekeeping operations and serves as an opportunity to spread peaceful atmosphere throughout the world, not to mention of the Korean Peninsula.