March 4, 2004

The second round of the Six-Party Talks, which opened in Beijing on February 25 and closed on February 28, yielded meaningful results.

The participating countries adopted the Chairman’s Statement, a seven-point summary of items agreed on in the consultation. Initially, the meeting was intended to adopt a joint press statement, but due to some technical problems, the Chairman’s Statement was announced.

The Chairman’s Statement highlights much of the same contents as the abortive joint press statement and has political weight since it was endorsed by each of the participating countries. After the close of the Six-Party Talks, the U.S. and North Korean delegates each held press conferences in Beijing, openly affirming that the Chairman’s Statement contained the items agreed on during the talks. Both sides expressed a willingness to honor the statement.

The U.S. and N. Korea Vow to Honor Agreement

The Chairman’s Statement is significant, in that it represents the first document endorsed by the participating countries since the North Korean nuclear issue resurfaced in October 2002. In it, the participating countries confirmed “their commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula,” and determination to resolve the issue “peacefully through dialogue;” the statement calls for the participating countries to take “coordinated steps to address the nuclear issue and the related concerns.”
They also agreed to hold the third round of the talks in Beijing within the second quarter and to establish “a working group in preparation for the plenary session.” It can be said that the adoption of the Chairman’s Statement lays the groundwork for holding the talks in a sustainable, stable manner.

When compared with the first round, the second round made considerable progress on “substantive issues” and “attitudes were serious.”

Broad-ranging discussions were held on various pending issues, including how to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem, possible measures in response to a nuclear freeze and how to turn the talks into a regular forum. If the first round revolved around a discussion of principles for approaching the issue, the second round started full-dress discussions on substantive issues on the basis of the outcome of the consultations thus far.

**Inter-Korean Dialogue Progresses as Well**

The participating nations took very serious and positive attitudes to produce concrete results from the talks. This represents the evolution of the talks into a substantive forum to tackle the North’s nuclear issue rather than a stage for proclaiming unilateral positions.

The Korean Government exerted proactive efforts to help produce tangible results.

The Government proposed that when certain conditions are met, a nuclear freeze by the North should be matched by energy support from other nations and that as the North proceeds with dismantling its nuclear programs, its security should be guaranteed in three phases. The proposal is a realistic and balanced compromise that was needed to make the talks progress.

Participating nations expressed a positive reaction and support for the Government’s endeavors. Regarding our offer to tie the nuclear freeze and energy support, China and Russia expressed their willingness to participate in it and the United States and Japan expressed understanding and support. On the eve of the closing of the talks, Korean Foreign Minister
Ban Ki-moon telephoned U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and asked for his cooperation in formulating a joint press statement.

The Government exerted its best efforts holding a separate South-North contact. On February 24, just before the Beijing talks were to begin, the Southern delegation contacted their Northern counterpart. During the first round of Six-Party Talks, the two Korean delegations only touched the surface of the nuclear issue, but this time they engaged in substantial discussions on the matter.

The change of the North’s attitudes at the meeting was noteworthy in that their delegation showed sincerity in tackling the nuclear problem. The increased friendliness on the part of the Northern delegation was obvious and they expressed appreciation for the earnest effort the South has made so far. They even accepted the South’s recommendation on some substantive matters.

The latest Six-Party Talks in Beijing constitute an important step forward in the process of resolving the North’s nuclear issue. Their agreement to hold the talks on a regular basis signifies that the nuclear issue will be dealt with through dialogue on a stable basis.

**Regularized Talks Mean Dialogue on Stable Basis**

At the forthcoming working group meetings and the third round of the Six-Party Talks, the participants are expected to have in-depth discussions on substantive matters. The recent Beijing talks were not able to produce concrete agreements on a principle for settling the North Korean nuclear issue owing to differences in basic positions. In the next round of talks, South Korea wants to reap some fruit regarding the principle for resolving the nuclear issue, for example, measures for guaranteeing security for the North, the North’s plans for freezing nuclear program and corresponding energy support measures for Pyongyang.

Based on the results of the Beijing talks, the Government is looking forward to holding working group discussions with the participating nations and preparing for the third round of the Six-Party Talks. Through close consultations with all the parties concerned, the Government will strive to help come up with a comprehensive settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue.