

Report on The Elders' visit to the Korean Peninsula and China 24-29 April 2011



*Martti Ahtisaari, Mary Robinson, Jimmy Carter and Gro Brundtland
at The Elders' press conference in Seoul*

1. Context

Since their establishment as a group in 2007, The Elders have been concerned about the security and humanitarian situation on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the troubled state of inter-Korean relations. In February 2011, the Elders received an invitation from the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to visit the country. The invitation followed a private visit made by Jimmy Carter to the DPRK in August 2010 during which the possibility of Elders' engagement was discussed.¹

In light of the recent high level of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the absence of official bilateral or multilateral dialogue on regional security and nuclear issues, and reports by Pyongyang-based international organisations of impending serious food shortages and deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the DPRK, The Elders agreed that they should try to help to address these immense challenges. It was agreed that a four-person delegation would travel on behalf of the group to China, the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) to consult senior government officials, humanitarian organisations, foreign diplomats, and academic experts on possible ways forward.

The delegation comprised former Finnish President, Mr Martti Ahtisaari, former Norwegian Prime Minister and Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Gro Brundtland, former U.S. President, Mr Jimmy Carter (delegation leader), and former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Mary Robinson. They were accompanied by the CEO

¹ President Carter visited the DPRK on a two-day private humanitarian mission to secure the release of a U.S. citizen, Aijalon Gomes. See: <http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/north-korea-peace.html>

of The Elders, Mrs Mabel van Oranje, and other staff. In advance, a staff team had visited the same three countries as well as the United States, to prepare the way for what was the first visit to the region for the organisation.



The Elders at the state guesthouse in Pyongyang

2. Summary of the Elders' itinerary

The visit to China and the Korean Peninsula took place from 24-29 April 2011. The purpose was: (a) to explore how to contribute to an easing of tensions between the DPRK and ROK, as well as with the latter's chief ally, the U.S.; and (b) to discuss how to address the reported food crisis. The visit to the DPRK also provided the Elders with a timely opportunity to raise issues related to the people's basic rights to food, health and education directly with officials, and to take up ways to improve women's and children's rights – a subject raised in advance by the authorities in Pyongyang.

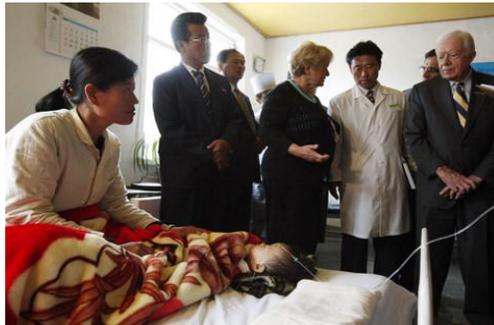
The Elders emphasised that they did not seek to interfere in official negotiations and were not carrying official messages from any government. They aimed to listen to all sides and, where appropriate, offer their advice in the interests of helping to foster peace, stability and prosperity for all people on the Korean Peninsula, and to ensure greater respect for human rights.

In all three countries, the Elders met the respective Foreign Ministers, chief negotiators for the Six-Party Talks on nuclear and security issues (the agreed multilateral forum) and foreign diplomats. In the DPRK, the Elders had discussions with the titular head of state Kim Yong Nam (President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly), military officials, UN officials, representatives of humanitarian agencies, university students and representatives of a women's union. They also travelled north of Pyongyang on a half-day field visit, which was arranged in cooperation with UN agencies and the government, to see food, education and health conditions for themselves.

The Elders were unable to meet the DPRK leader, Chairman Kim Jong Il, in person. However, as the Elders were on their way to the airport in Pyongyang, they were called back to the official guesthouse for an unscheduled last meeting. Kim Gye Kwan, a close adviser on foreign affairs to

the leader, transmitted what he described as an important message from Kim Jong Il (further details below).

Immediately on arrival in Seoul, having flown directly from Pyongyang, the Elders met the Foreign and Unification Ministers to learn about the ROK's positions and to inform them about their meetings in the DRPK; they also briefed representatives of the media, foreign diplomats and members of think tanks. One of the most touching moments of their brief stay in Seoul was a visit to a school for North Korean refugee youths and children, most of whom had been separated from their parents after fleeing the country.



Gro Brundtland and Jimmy Carter visiting the pediatric ward in Pyongsong City Hospital, DPRK



Mary Robinson with young women refugees from the DPRK at the Yeomyung School in Seoul

3. Main findings from the Elders' trip

This section provides a summary of the main findings and observations from the Elders' visit to China and the Korean Peninsula in relation to nuclear/security issues, inter-Korean relations and the humanitarian situation in the DPRK.

Nuclear/security issues

- The message that the Elders received from Chairman Kim Jong Il stated that the DPRK is willing to return to the Six-Party Talks on denuclearisation and security issues – without preconditions.

- Chairman Kim Jong Il also noted that the DPRK will continue to abide by the 19 September 2005 Joint Statement, the key multilateral framework document on denuclearisation.²
- The ROK government demands “sincere” actions and unilateral steps by the DPRK on denuclearisation ahead of the resumption of the Six-Party Talks.
- The US government supports fully the ROK government’s current position, which forms part of what Washington describes as a policy of “strategic patience”.
- The Chinese government is working energetically behind the scenes to encourage the parties to resume the Six-Party Talks, which fall under its chairmanship.
- The Japanese government supports the basic positions of the US and ROK while continuing to express concern over the failure of the DPRK to settle satisfactorily all outstanding issues related to the fate of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents.

“After my first visit to the DPRK, I believe that peace is possible, but the parties are unlikely to make much progress by demanding unilateral action of each other. Having witnessed many conflicts, a solution can only be found through an early resumption of dialogue on all outstanding issues.” (Martti Ahtisaari)

Inter-Korean relations

- Kim Jong Il informed the Elders that the DPRK is willing to enter into direct talks with the ROK, including at the level of the leaders (i.e. a summit) and on all issues.
- The ROK government maintains its insistence on receiving an apology from the DPRK over the two military incidents of 2010 prior to the commencement of official bilateral talks – i.e. the sinking of the *Cheonan* naval vessel on 26 March 2010, in which 46 South Korean crew members died, and the shelling of the South Korean claimed island of Yeonpyeong in the disputed waters of the Yellow Sea on 23 November 2010, in which two civilians were killed and two ROK marines were killed, with many wounded.
- The Elders observed that the DPRK continues to claim that it was not involved in the *Cheonan* incident and that the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island was an act of self-defence. They sensed that it is highly unlikely that the DPRK would apologise for the incidents, while noting that the DPRK has already expressed regret over the loss of civilian life.
- Based on their discussions in Pyongyang and Seoul, the Elders did not anticipate an imminent breakthrough leading to the resumption of official inter-Korean dialogue. However, the Elders believe that the proposal for a meeting between the North and South, including at the level of a summit, to discuss all outstanding issues is significant and deserves further exploration.

² On 19 September 2005, the participants in the fourth round of Six-Party Talks issued a joint statement of principles to guide future negotiations. In the statement, the DPRK committed to abandon its nuclear weapons and to return, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In exchange, the other participants at the talks agreed to discuss the provision of a light water reactor to the DPRK and the U.S. undertook to respect DPRK sovereignty. See: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t212707.htm>

- The Elders believe that the Chinese government considers the re-establishment of official bilateral talks between the ROK and the DPRK to be a strong possibility.

“On relations between North and South Korea, there are no quick fixes to security and nuclear issues, and progress will require greater flexibility, sincerity and commitment from all parties.”
(Jimmy Carter)

Humanitarian situation in the DPRK

- Apart from long-term, chronic challenges to the provision of sufficient food to its growing population, the Elders learned that the DPRK has recently suffered exogenous shocks which have made the situation worse. These include natural disasters (unseasonably heavy rainfall, followed by an exceptionally cold winter), an outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and the cessation of bilateral food and fertilizer assistance from the ROK.
- There are legitimate concerns that the DPRK authorities may not be playing their full part in providing for the wellbeing of their own people, by not releasing food grains from strategic stock reserves and allocating sufficient funds to purchase food on the world market.
- Nevertheless, recent assessments carried out jointly by the World Food Program (WFP), the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNICEF (in which others participated including representatives of the EU) and, separately, by a group of US NGOs, concluded that a real crisis affecting up to a quarter of the entire population (six out of 24 million persons) was imminent. These missions had unprecedented access to the country. The Elders found their reports to be thorough and credible.
- The Elders observed that food rations to the people provided through the Public Distribution System are being progressively reduced to below adequate levels. Food distribution centers are handing out some 330 grams of cereals per person per day, which provides around 1,200 calories – below what an active person needs on a daily basis. The WFP has been informed that rations will soon be cut to 190 grams per day (around 650 calories). The Elders noted with concern that around one-third of all children are stunted, one-fifth of all children are underweight, and one in every four lactating mothers is malnourished.
- The Elders learned during their visit to the DPRK that a few weeks earlier the WFP had reached agreement with the government on improved transparency and monitoring of food distribution. Improved operating conditions will allow: (a) for the WFP to deliver most food directly to institutions in need (e.g. orphanages, nurseries, schools); and (b) sufficient access, transparency and monitoring throughout the country (e.g. only 24 hour notice for field travel; more Korean speaking staff; permission to visit informal food markets). WFP representatives described this degree of promised access to beneficiaries in need as “unprecedented”.

- During the visit to the DPRK, the Elders also took note of the following humanitarian issues of concern: most people have limited access to sufficient potable water, threatening the health of children and other vulnerable groups; diarrhoea and pneumonia are two major fatal diseases; only 30 percent of essential medicines are available in the country at present; figures for maternal and infant mortality are very high: as many as 250 women per 100,000 die in child birth, while infant mortality is at 26 per 1,000; in recent years the DPRK has made few new investments in improving health systems and facilities; and there are severe shortages of resources such as textbooks and other basic materials in schools.

“Food security is one of a number of health issues that need to be addressed. One-third of North Korean children’s growth is stunted due to a poor diet and one in five children is underweight. Stunting affects brain development, posing serious risks to future generations. There is also chronic diarrhoea and respiratory disease, especially among children. The DPRK needs to invest in water and sanitation systems, medical services and the provision of basic medicines to deal with these health problems.” (Gro Brundtland)

Note: During the visit to the DPRK, the Elders submitted a written request to Kim Yong Nam for the release of U.S. citizen Eddie Jun (Yong-su) on humanitarian grounds. The Elders were informed that legal proceedings against him had not been completed. While this initial response was disappointing, the Elders were informed by the Swedish Ambassador in Pyongyang, who handles consular arrangements for U.S. citizens in the DPRK on behalf of the U.S. government, that Mr Jun’s health and mental state are good.

4. Next steps

The Elders intend to continue to follow the situation on the Korean Peninsula and remain engaged with China, the DPRK, the ROK, the other countries participating in the Six-Party Talks, and other actors involved in addressing security, nuclear, inter-Korean and humanitarian challenges. They hope to be able to play a modest, but constructive, role in helping address those issues of most concern in the North East Asian region.

In the immediate follow-up to their visit to the Korean Peninsula and China, the Elders urge the international community to:

- a. Lend support, where appropriate, to the resumption of official bilateral talks between the DPRK and ROK on all outstanding issues, including at the level of the leaders, and multilateral talks through the Six-Party Talks framework.

- b. Respond positively and urgently to the appeals of the DPRK Government and international humanitarian agencies to provide emergency food assistance to the most vulnerable sections of the North Korean population.³ The Elders emphasise that the provision of food aid should not detract from the DPRK government's fundamental responsibility to provide for its own people, if necessary through appropriate policy reforms. The Elders also stress the importance of the DPRK fulfilling the agreements reached with UN agencies on transparency and monitoring of food aid distribution.
- c. Support the UN Consolidated Appeal for the DPRK for 2011: \$172 million for food and \$40 million for non-food (including health), stressing that humanitarian assistance should not be linked to political and security considerations. Levels of official donor support to the DPRK have been historically poor, especially compared with other major aid recipients, and in recent years have declined even further.
- d. Call on the DPRK to comply with the most recent resolution of the UN Human Rights Council, including by permitting a visit to the country by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK.⁴

“Food is a basic human right, but because of serious weather problems and donor cutbacks, the amount of food being distributed to families is well below what is needed, leading to a hidden crisis. Food aid levels must be raised significantly and urgently. Donors should be reassured by the DPRK’s recent agreement with the World Food Program to improve transparency and monitoring of food distribution.” (Mary Robinson)



Mary Robinson, Jimmy Carter, Gro Brundtland and Martti Ahtisaari
at the Elders' press briefing in Beijing

³ For further information on the WFP appeal, launched on 29 April 2011, see: <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-launches-emergency-operation-support-35-mln-vulnerable-people-dprk>

⁴ The Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council at its meeting on 24 March 2011 on the “Situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” can be found at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4db95e522.html>

Annex

i) Elders' media releases on the Korean Peninsula Initiative

- [“The Elders' Korean Peninsula initiative”](#) (8 April 2011)
- [“The Elders to focus on easing inter-Korean tensions”](#) (24 April 2011)
- [“The Elders urge immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance to DPRK and early resumption of dialogue on all outstanding issues”](#) (28 April 2011)

ii) Elders' blogs from the visit to the Korean Peninsula and China

- [“Jimmy Carter's blog from North Korea”](#), Jimmy Carter (27 April 2011)
- [“Meeting refugees from North Korea”](#), by Mary Robinson (29 April 2011)

iii) Photos and video of the Elders in North and South Korea

- [Video](#) (6 minutes in length)
- [Photos](#)

iv) Elders' meetings in Beijing, 24-25 April 2011

- Mr Yang Jiechi, Foreign Minister of China;
- Mr Wu Dawei, Special Representative for North Korean Affairs;
- Ms Li Xiaolin, Executive Vice President and other officials from the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, accompanied by Chinese business representatives;
- Representatives of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and the China Institute of International Studies;
- Mr Yutaka Yokoi, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, Japanese Embassy, Beijing;
- Mr Jérôme Sauvage, UN Resident Coordinator, DPRK, and Mrs Claudia von Roehl, World Food Program Country Director, DPRK;
- Ms Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, North East Asia Project Director & China Adviser (based in Beijing) and Mr Daniel Pinkston, North East Asia Deputy Project Director (based in Seoul), International Crisis Group;
- Press briefing at the outset of the regional visit.

v) Elders' meetings in the DPRK, 26-28 April 2011

- Mr Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly;
- Mr Pak Ui Chun, Foreign Minister;
- Mr Kim Kye Gwan, First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (twice);
- Mr Ri Yong Ho, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- Mr Ri Jong Hyok, Vice President of the Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee;
- Major-General Pak Rim Su, Representative of Panmunjom Mission of the Korean People's Army;
- Mrs Ro Song Sil, Chairwoman, Central Committee of the Democratic Women's Union of Korea;
- Ms Barbro Elm, Ambassador, Embassy of Sweden;
- Reception with foreign diplomats, heads of UN agencies and representatives of humanitarian organisations operating in the DPRK, hosted by Ms Katharina Zellweger, Representative, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation;
- Visit to Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies to meet students;
- Field trip to Pyongsong City: included visit to households of pregnant/lactating mothers, food distribution centre, baby home, Pyongsong City Hospital, and Okjon Secondary School to meet nursing students.

vi) Elders' meetings in Seoul, 28-29 April 2011

- Mr Kim Sung-hwan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade;
- Mr Hyun In-taek, Minister of Unification;
- Mr Wi Sung-lac, Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs;
- Mr Song Min-soon, Democratic Party, Member of the National Assembly, former Foreign Minister;
- Ms Kathleen Stephens, US Ambassador to the ROK, and General Walter Sharp, Commander, US Forces Korea (joint meeting);
- Ambassadors of European Union member states;
- Roundtable discussion with representatives of ROK think tanks;
- Visit to a privately-funded school in Seoul (Yeomyung School) that assists young defectors from the DPRK adjust to life in the ROK;
- Press conference for ROK and international media.