
The Main Theme of the 15th Jeju Forum

Reinventing Multilateral Cooperation in Asia

The pursuit of cooperation is one of the most distinctive features of human beings. It enables otherwise feeble humanity to prevail. However, often times in history, international cooperation among nations is overshadowed by the unilateral pursuit of narrow self-interest by states, thereby delivering disastrous consequences to the human community. After all, cooperation is human, powerful, yet sometimes fragile.

To guard the cooperative spirit against unilateral impulses, human beings have institutionalized multilateral cooperation, paving the way for the prosperity of the international community. Various mechanisms and institutions have been devised for multilateral cooperation and ultimately for the common interests of humanity. One of the most significant cases is, unquestionably, the United Nations.

The UN and other multilateral institutions have contributed to making the world safer and more prosperous. Recently, however, the spirit of multilateral cooperation has receded. The unilateral policies of some states are undermining multilateral institutions, thereby harming the cooperative spirit. Global challenges, such as environmental degradation, climate change, protectionism, and terrorism are on the verge of being sidelined due to the inclination for unilateralism. In other words, multilateral cooperation in the international stage is gradually marginalized by unilateralism based on populist nationalism, protectionism, and transactionalism.

In Asia, the rivalry between major powers is causing economic and political tensions, which can be felt in every corner of the region. Furthermore, various disputes among nations in the region are yet to be solved. And, the North Korean nuclear program persists as a great threat to Northeast Asia and to world peace.

Multilateral cooperation is essential in Asia to achieve regional peace and prosperity. However, if the international community is not able to turn the tide of unilateralism to multilateral cooperation, humanity will face a danger of moving backwards in history.

Against this backdrop, Jeju Forum 2020 with its main theme, “Reinventing Multilateral Cooperation in Asia,” will provide an opportunity for the international community to discuss how multilateral cooperation is to be re-engineered in Asia. At the Forum, prominent world leaders, Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, experts, and activists are expected to discuss ways to reinvent multilateralism in Asia and in the world.