Topic Research Guide

I. Peace, Security and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula

The Korean question” was brought before the United Nations General Assembly, and the goals of free elections and reunification of the peninsula were established without support from the Soviet bloc. In the fall of 1948, both the Republic of Korea (RoK) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) were formally established under leaders whose stated goals included reunification of the peninsula. After two years of border skirmishes and raids, the DPRK launched a full scale invasion of the South on 25 June 1950. Hostilities on the peninsula continued, with significant involvement from the UN, the United States, and China, until an armistice agreement was reached on 27 July 1953.

Secretive North-South talks regarding unification began in the 1970s, and momentum for constructive dialogue between the two countries accelerated with the end of the Cold War. In 1991, both the DPRK and the RoK joined the United Nations. For much of the 1990s, talks centered around the DPRK’s nuclear-related activities, which have at times posed considerable challenges to reunification dialogue. Though both countries signed the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1992, it and subsequent international agreements such as the Agreed Framework, were seriously hindered by challenges in their implementation. Recurring famines in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the subsequent humanitarian assistance by the international community have also been a key area of bilateral and multilateral relations in recent years. In both 1996 and 1998, severe famine occurred in the DPRK following widespread floods, and in 2001, severe drought again threatened the country’s food security. The international community’s response has been complicated by political tensions that have limited humanitarian access at times. However, the World Food Programme estimates that emergency operations between 1995 and 2005 directly supported one third of the country’s population. Since 2007, gains in food security have been reversed, and the DPRK’s reliance on external food aid has been increasing. Bilateral relations improved at the beginning of the decade, resulting in a historic inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang on 13-15 June 2000. The result was the South-North Declaration, signed by former Republic of Korea President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman Kim Jong II of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on 15 June 2000. The Declaration consisted of five points, promoting cooperation through the resolution of humanitarian issues by integrating the economy and cultural aspects of civil society. In response, the UN General Assembly adopted A/RES/55/11 on 31 October 2000, which welcomed and supported the developments arising from the inter-Korean summit, calling it a “major breakthrough in inter-Korean relations and in realizing eventual peaceful reunification.”

In recent years, a number of programs have aimed to expand bilateral functional cooperation. Both governments worked together in repairing the Gaeseong-Pyongyang highway and in completing the Gaesong-Sinuiju railroad; in May 2007, passenger trains crossed the North-South border for the first time in 56 years. In addition, joint educational programs have been undertaken to educate the youth of Korea on reconciliation and reunification. The UN has encouraged ongoing efforts to initiate and sustain a constructive dialogue, but reunification
efforts have been overshadowed by the international community’s concern for the nuclear-related activities by the DPRK. In August 2003, the Six Party Talks began between the United States, Republic of Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, China, the Russian Federation, and Japan, with discussions centered around the DPRK’s nuclear-related activities. Although efforts were initially hampered when the DPRK announced in 2003 its intentions to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, an agreement was reached in September 2005 between the six countries in which the DPRK agreed to stop its nuclear testing. However, on 9 October 2006 the DPRK announced its nuclear weapons capability with a successful underground test. In response, the UN Security Council adopted S/RES/1718, which called for the suspension of the DPRK’s ballistic missile and nuclear weapons activities. On 2-4 October 2007, a second inter-Korean summit took place in Pyongyang. The summit resulted in the Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace and Prosperity, which aims to bolster economic cooperation and promote regional peace and security. At the summit, the DPRK agreed to begin the disarmament process in exchange for aid and diplomatic concessions. On 16 November 2007, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 62/5, which celebrated the summit and affirmed that inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation were essential for consolidating peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The General Assembly called on Member States to “continue supporting the inter-Korean dialogue, reconciliation, and reunification,” and encouraged both governments to implement the Declaration “fully and in good faith” in an effort to develop a sound foundation for peaceful reunification efforts in the future.

The GA’s recent discussions have also focused on human rights issues in the DPRK. In 2008, the GA called attention to the lack of freedom of thought or movement in the country, the trafficking of women, violations of worker’s rights, and the relation between human rights violations and the country’s widespread malnutrition. While expressing serious concern at the continued reports of systematic and widespread violations of civil, economic, and social rights, the Assembly recognized the potential of the inter-Korean dialogue to help improve the human rights and humanitarian situation in the DPRK. Despite the progress indicated by the most recent inter-Korean summit, tensions on the divided peninsula have increased markedly. During 2008, the DPRK began the process of dismantling its Yongbyon nuclear facility in agreement with the second summit conditions, but progress stalled when disarmament talks broke down in December 2008. The following month, the DPRK announced its intent to cancel all military and political deals with the Republic of Korea and accused Seoul of “hostile intent.” In April and May of 2009, the DPRK engaged in a series of missile launches and underground nuclear tests. In response, the Security Council unanimously condemned the missile testing as a violation of S/RES/1718 and imposed tougher sanctions. In the wake of criticism from the international community, the DPRK declared its withdrawal from the Six Party Talks, its intention to restart its nuclear facilities, and its position that the DPRK was no longer bound by the 1953 armistice.
In its work, the General Assembly has typically avoided in-depth discussions of the DPRK’s nuclear program, leaving consideration of that topic to the relevant UN bodies and agencies. However, Member States have encouraged the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks and continue the denuclearization process, and the UN has expressed its hope that talks will soon resume. In light of the ongoing developments and tense atmosphere, the General Assembly must consider how its discussions and recommendations can best support efforts to achieve peace and reunification in the Korean peninsula.

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“Timeline: North Korea; a chronology of key events,” BBC News, 13 June 2009, news.bbc.co.uk.

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A/RES/55/11
A/62/264
A/62/L.4
A/55/L.14

S/RES/1718
S/RES/825
A/HRC/7/20
CRC/C/OPAC/KOR/Q/1/Add.1
CRC/C/PRK/4
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Additional Web Resources:
www.amnesty.org - Amnesty International
www.hrw.org/asia/north-korea - Human Rights Watch
www.koreanunification.net - Korean Unification Studies (Note: While this is a blog, it contains excellent source material and resource links)
It might be helpful to research your government’s perspective on the following questions:

- What role can functional development and cooperation play in the reunification process?
- How has food security situation in the DPRK impacted reunification efforts? In what ways can the international community assist?
- Which past measures have been most supportive of reunification goals, and how can past lessons inform future actions?
- Given the ability of the General Assembly to discuss and issue recommendations, what current course of action should the Assembly take?
II. Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas

Gender equality has always been a major area of concern for the UN. Of particular concern is the situation of rural women, who comprise the majority of the more than one billion people living in abject poverty and who also encounter some of the most egregious and entrenched inequality. The plight of women in rural areas also merits special consideration in light of the widespread effects of the global economic recession. Adverse economic conditions in many developing countries have had a disproportionately negative impact on rural women who often suffer the greatest burden of poverty.

A history of discrimination and unequal access to health care, education, technology, capital and land remain prime causes of the feminization of poverty. To provide for their families, women often must choose either dangerous, exploitative working conditions or unemployment and worsening hardship. Land is the primary form of wealth and collateral in many areas, which can make it more difficult for women to obtain loans and take advantage of other economic growth opportunities. Additional social barriers prevent many girls from attending school or women from obtaining health care, both which compound and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

In 1975, the UN established the International Women’s Year to highlight issues of gender inequality. The subsequent Decade for Women (1976-1985) sought to remedy past shortcomings in development philosophies that had economically marginalized women and increased their dependence on men. It also emphasized the need to bring women into decision-making at all levels. Accordingly, several funds and organizations including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) were created to improve the situation of women. At the conclusion of the Decade, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were adopted, which concretized measures to achieve goals and objectives for the advancement of women.

The situation of rural women has been recognized and addressed in several UN conventions and conferences. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically calls for the elimination of discrimination against rural women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action drafted in 1995 specifically emphasized the need to improve the situation of women in rural areas by increasing their incomes and providing food security. In 2000, the Beijing +5 conference titled Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century called for equal access to economic, educational, and health care resources. The conference also advocated for the continuation of microcredit ventures to help alleviate poverty for women in rural areas.

In recent years, specific efforts to address and to improve the situation of rural women have often worked in concert with Member States’ efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). For instance, the goal of achieving gender equality focuses on expanding access to education by addressing circumstances preventing women and girls from attending school. School access for girls can be hindered by a lack of school sanitation facilities or a lack of access to water, which can necessitate girls’ household labor. Similarly, efforts to eliminate poverty and
hunger include reducing the number of people earning less than $1 per day and working toward full and productive employment for all, which includes rural women.

The UN has also taken steps to raise awareness and establish the situation of rural women as a more specific priority. The first International Day of Rural Women, established by the General Assembly in 2007, was observed in October 2008 and celebrates the role and contributions of rural women in promoting development, ensuring food security, eradicating rural poverty, and sustaining their families and communities. In support of the 2008 International Day of Rural Women, which coincided with the food production-focused World Rural Women’s Day, the Secretary-General urged countries to make rural women’s needs a top priority at the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. During the December 2008 conference the body touched on the fact that the global economic crisis has had a grave effect on rural women. It called for increased attention to basic economic and social infrastructure and inclusive social services. The conference also identified economic empowerment of women as essential to a sustainable vibrant economy. Despite these efforts to increase awareness regarding the situation of rural women, discrimination in access to education, health care, and economic means persists in many rural areas. Addressing these issues will require increased consultation with rural women in implementing future programs, as well as improved access to transportation and information and communication technology. It is possible that Member States with existing programs to further the cause of women’s equality will be scaled back in the face of the continuing global economic crisis. Yet financial resources and support for governments striving to meet the MDG targets will need to be increased if efforts to improve the situation of rural women will be successful. At the same time, increased support will also be needed from Member States to provide microcredit and other direct financial assistance services to more women in rural areas in order to promote their economic empowerment.

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UN Documents:

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A/RES/62/206  A/62/187
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A/RES/61/145  A/60/138
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A/RES/60/138  • Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
A/RES/56/188  Discrimination Against Women
A/RES/56/128  • Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the
A/63/425  Advancement of Women

Additional Web Resources:
www.gender-budgets.org – Gender Responsive Budgeting
www.rural-womens-day.org - World Rural Women’s Day
www.unifem.org - UN Development Fund for Women
www.un.org/womenwatch - UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender - Millennium Development Goals Related to Gender
www.ifad.org/gender - International Fund for Agricultural Development

It might be helpful to research your government’s perspective on the follow questions:

• How do cultural considerations affect programs aimed at the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas?
• In what ways can developed countries help developing countries ensure equal access to education and health care for women in rural areas?
• How can countries with large rural populations be encouraged to better integrate women into mainstream society and include the concerns and issues of rural women in state development programs?
• What actions or mechanisms could the General Assembly recommend to ensure that increased development financing is applied in ways that best address the needs of rural women?