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**General Debate**

**Contemporary Challenges to Democracy:  
Overcoming Division and Building Community**

*Delivered by Park Byeong-seug,  
Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea*

Honorable fellow Speakers and delegates!

I am Park Byeong-seug, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea.

At the outset, I'd like to express my deep gratitude/ to Her Excellency Meritxell Batet, President of the Congress of Deputies, His Excellency Ander Gil, President of the Senate, Honorable Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU, and Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU, for the excellent organization of the Assembly.

Honorable delegates!

Political polarizáció poses a serious threat/ to democracy around the world. Polarized politics is dividing our

communities/ while undermining the democrátic values of cómpromise, negotiátion, tólerance, and moderátion. This is a global phenómemon.

I have to admít/ that the Republic of Korea is not immúne to this trend. We are witnessing cónflicts inténsifying/ not just between ideológies, classes, and regions, but also between generátions and genders. Fake news and disinformátion spreading wildly on social media/ are adding fuel to this divide.

Esteemed delegates!

Democracy can retain its role as a univérsal value/ only when we overcome this crisis of división.

Today, I'd like to share with you three inítiatives/ undertaken by the Korean National Assembly/ to address political polarizátion and presérve democracy.

The first inítiative is the estáblishment of the National Unity Committee.

I believe that it is the calling of our time/ to resólve political and economic polarizátion and dispáritý, and the resulting social división. This convicción led me to bring together experts from all walks of life/ and launch this committee in February this year/ as an advísory body/ reporting directly to the Speaker. Two former Speakers from the ruling and opposition parties/

agreed to serve as the co-chairs/ and 21 experts from political, académic, and journalistic circles/ were invited to sit on the committee. Befitting the title “national unity,” conservative and liberal blocs were equally represented.

To enable more in-depth discussions, the committee was divided into political, economic, and social sectors. It took a total of 48 meetings and seven months/ to complete their long journey.

The committee proposed the adoption of a new social cóntract/ based on a compréhensive solution/ encómpassing labor, welfare, and innovation sectors. It also recommended/ the establishment of a grand cónpromise body/ under the Speaker’s Office/ for the institutionalizátion of a social cóntract.

Political polarization is largely rooted/ in labor income inequálicity, failure of welfare and redistribútion, and cónflict of interests in innovation. As a mixture of issues are invólved, the committee suggested/ that a successful solution should take the form of a package deal, rather than a set of séparate arrangements.

The second initiative is the effort to restóre parliaméntary politics.

In Korea’s parliaméntary history, there have been quite a few times/ where parliaméntary politics stopped functioning/ due to



serious conflicts between the ruling and opposition parties/ under the presidential system. In the face of situations like this, my first principle has always been/ to reach consensus and compromise through dialogue.

Moreover, constant efforts to seek negotiation and compromise/ have also resulted in a bipartisan agreement/ to launch the National Assembly Special Committee on Media Reforms/ to counter fake news and extreme views/ on social media networks.

The committee, which is made up of 18 MPs, 9 each from the ruling and opposition parties, has until the end of this year/ to find a fundamental solution to the problem of “the tail wagging the dog,” that is, the distortion of public opinion/ by small groups of people.

Communication can build consensus, which can in turn lead to compromise. Though this process can be frustrating at times, upholding the principle of compromise/ is the only way/ to restore parliamentary politics.

The third and last one/ that I’d like to draw your attention to/ is our initiative to hold an inter-Korean parliamentary meeting.

The most extreme form of division in Korea/ is the division of the Korean Peninsula. I am confident/ that establishing a lasting peace on the Peninsula/ will make a significant contribution to peace and prosperity/ not just in Asia but also all around the world.

Soon after I took office as the Speaker, I made public/ my intention to meet with the leader of the Supreme People's Assembly/ anytime, anywhere, and without any conditions/ to discuss peace and prosperity/ on the Korean Peninsula. Without dialogue, we cannot hope to build peace.

Meanwhile, the Korean government has been dedicating efforts/ toward an end-of-war declaration, where three parties – the two Koreas and the U.S./ – or four parties – the two Koreas, the U.S., and China/ – get together and declare a formal end to the Korean War. I would deeply appreciate your interest and support/ regarding this important issue.

Distinguished delegates!

Going through COVID-19, we have learned/ that no one is safe/ until everyone is safe. The pandemic has also taught us/ the significance of global solidarity and cooperation/ as well as the danger of division.

In the face of declining democracy around the world, we must reaffirm our faith in global solidarity and cooperation/ to take on new challenges and obstacles. The Republic of Korea is ready/ to play an active role in the process.

Thank you for your kind attention.