



Ulaanbaatar Process A Civil Society Dialogue for Peace and Stability in Northeast Asia

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

February 2017

Introduction

The Ulaanbaatar Process, a civil society dialogue for peace and stability in Northeast Asia, was launched by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) in the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar in June, 2015. Coordinated by the GPPAC Global and Northeast Asia Regional Secretariats and Mongolian NGO Blue Banner, this process promotes effective regional Track 2 dialogue, seeking to strengthen the role of civil society as a complement to the Track 1 process, towards the development of an institutionalized regional peace and security mechanism for Northeast Asia. Two meetings have been held thus far, annually in 2015 and 2016, with attendance by participants from all of the Six Party Talks member countries. This document outlines the background, composition, activities and intended impacts of this process.

Background

Regional Context

The Northeast Asia region remains characterized by Cold War era political interactions. The region is, at times, charged with fierce rhetoric amid fears of military escalation, and lacks institutional mechanisms for peace and security. The Korean Peninsula remains in an armistice system, without a peace treaty to end the Korean War. The absence of sustained dialogue and repeated military aggressions have heightened tensions within the Korean Peninsula and across the region.

Launched in 2003, the Six Party Talks involve China, the DPRK, the ROK, Russia, Japan and the US. The Talks are the closest alternative to an institutional mechanism for regional peace and security, and have been the best available tool for peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue in Northeast Asia. Various rounds have achieved some results, demonstrating that progress in regional engagement is possible. Yet the suspension of the Talks since 2009 and increasing calls for a hard-line response have left little room for the resumption of dialogue on a governmental level.

Inflammatory rhetoric and the escalation of several territorial disputes in the region emphasize the need to maintain space for dialogue and build trust and confidence between all parties. The past year has also seen continued nuclear tests conducted by the DPRK, as well as development of intercontinental ballistic missiles. At the same time, the ROK is currently experiencing a time of political upheaval and likely change in government. The new Trump administration in the United States has yet to clearly extrapolate its policy in relation to the DPRK, however had indicated that it may be open to dialogue. In order to move towards realizing regional peace and stability, it is imperative to revitalize dialogue processes - both bilateral and regional - on wide-ranging issues, based on mutual trust and confidence among all parties.

Moreover, the need for dialogue is emphasised in the UN OHCHR Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK. The report is explicit in recommending civil society organizations to foster opportunities for dialogue, and encourages contacts and opportunities for the exchange in such areas as culture, good governance and economic development.¹

¹ UN OHCHR, Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 2014, p.19

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Approach

As a worldwide alliance of civil society organizations structured around 15 regional networks, based on a network approach, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is well placed to convene and facilitate the Ulaanbaatar Process. Dialogue and Mediation is a key priority of GPPAC, supported by a working group comprised of representatives from nine regions, including Northeast Asia. With extensive practical experience in facilitating such processes, this group seeks to promote and enhance dialogue and mediation practices and processes in the regions, by generating knowledge, exchanging experiences and cooperating cross-regionally.

In addition to creating a politically viable platform for a Track 2 dialogue process, for the past 5 years GPPAC has built sufficient constituency reaching out to the political community and civil society in a broader sense. Importantly, GPPAC has secured sufficient access to the parties engaged in a Track 1 process. Realising the importance of relating the GPPAC supported Track 2 process to Track 1, GPPAC has developed relations with relevant governments that have a stake in addressing peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. This has led to working relations with the Governments of the ROK, DPRK, China, Japan, the US and Mongolia. GPPAC also has regular meeting and debriefings with the European External Action Service, and relevant UN institutions. Moreover, GPPAC has invested in building relationships with a broader constituency of civil society in related countries, including Russia.

Why Ulaanbaatar? The role of Mongolia

Central to the Ulaanbaatar Process is the emerging strategic role of Mongolia within the Northeast Asian context. Mongolia is a state with internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status that benefits from political security assurances of the five nuclear weapon states. It also maintains friendly diplomatic relations with all the states of the Six Party Talks and other states of the region. Hence it is well-positioned to play a significant and unique role as provider of political space and venue as well as a possible mediator for regional dialogue. The Mongolian government has supported GPPAC by hosting regional GPPAC meetings in 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2016 in Ulaanbaatar, focusing on various issues, including reducing nuclear threats through regional dialogue. GPPAC's Ulaanbaatar Focal Point, the NGO Blue Banner, plays the lead role in this coordination. Reflecting the role of Mongolia in this process, this dialogue is referred to as the 'Ulaanbaatar Process'.

Crucially, the Ulaanbaatar Process creates space for civil society perspectives from across the region, including both the DPRK and ROK, to be heard in the same forum. As a global network based on multi-stakeholder collaboration, with a foundation for constructive dialogue already developed by the GPPAC-NEA network in the region and with a neutral platform and location in Mongolia to convene the different parties, the Ulaanbaatar Process is uniquely positioned to serve as an effective regional Track 2 dialogue.

Objectives

The overall objective of the Ulaanbaatar Process is to support the creation of peace and stability throughout Northeast Asia, through the promotion of civil society dialogue.

The specific objectives of the process are:

- To strengthen the role of civil society in the context of building peace and stability in Northeast Asia
- To complement and contribute recommendations to official processes, including the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue for Northeast Asian Security initiated by the Mongolian government
- To support the development of an institutionalized regional mechanism supporting dialogue and reconciliation in Northeast Asia
- To contribute to overall confidence-building measures within the Northeast Asian region

Expected Impact

In strengthening the role of civil society to contribute to regional peace and security, the expected impact of the Ulaanbaatar Process is as follows:

- Opportunities for civil society representatives from the entire Northeast Asian region and from the larger GPPAC network, including representatives from the United States, to meet and exchange knowledge on a regular basis are created.
- Collaboration among civil society actors on initiatives to promote peace and stability in the region is strengthened.
- The Ulaanbaatar Process receives recognition and support from the countries in the region.
- Increased level of trust and collaboration amongst civil society groups in the region.
- Suggestions and recommendations coming out of the Ulaanbaatar process are increasingly discussed among governments and other relevant stakeholders in the region.

Priority Thematic Areas

The Ulaanbaatar Process is addressing the following main themes in 2016-2017:

- a) Issues pertaining to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula
- b) Establishment of a Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone

Subtopics to be addressed in the context of these two main themes include but are not limited to:

- Ending the Korean War with the replacement of the armistice with a permanent peace treaty
- Trust and confidence building in Northeast Asia
- Denuclearization and disarmament of the Korean Peninsula
- Energy security in Northeast Asia

The Ulaanbaatar Process will also address the cross-cutting issues of the role of civil society in Northeast Asian security and peace dialogue, and gender mainstreaming in Northeast Asia.

Participants and Engagement

Participants in the Ulaanbaatar Process comprise a combination of GPPAC Northeast Asia members and delegates from partner civil society organizations. Furthermore, other actors may be invited according to relevant experience in relation to thematic areas, upon consultation with regional participants and convenors. With a focus on creating and supporting peacebuilding opportunities, discussions will address how civil society can resolve both traditional and non-traditional security challenges through peaceful and collaborative means. To this end, experts on dialogue and mediation, including representatives of GPPAC's Dialogue and Mediation Working Group, may also be invited. Complementarity with official processes and engagement with representatives of governments, regional and international organizations will also be pursued, including side meetings, participation as resource persons, and submission of recommendations.

Activities – Making a habit of Dialogue

The core activity of the Ulaanbaatar Process is the dialogue between Northeast Asian civil society members in itself, promoting communication and cooperation and establishing a safe space for participation from all countries. To this end, building upon the two meetings held in 2015 and 2016, the Process will:

- Hold regular, face-to-face, closed-door meetings among members of civil society groups in the Northeast Asian region, most importantly, an annual Ulaanbaatar Process meeting.
- Convene additional annual working group meetings on thematic issues (e.g. the Korean Peninsula, gender issues).
- Disseminate strategic and targeted action-oriented policy recommendations, through submissions to Track 1 / 1.5 actors and outreach/constituency meetings in relevant capitals, including Seoul, Tokyo, Washington DC, Beijing and Pyongyang.
- Publish journal articles analysing key issues in the region and civil society recommendations.

Further information: <http://www.peaceportal.org/web/ulaanbaatar-process/>