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Fearing Korean Nuclear War, Women of 40 Nations Urge Trump to Seek Peace

By CHOE SANG-HUN APRIL 26, 2017

SEOUL, South Korea — As the White House prepared to brief members of the Senate on [North Korea](#) on Wednesday, female activists from more than 40 countries, including North and [South Korea](#), urged President Trump to defuse military tensions and start negotiating for peace to prevent war from erupting on the Korean Peninsula.

They said they feared that the rapidly escalating tensions on the peninsula, if left unchecked, could engulf the region in nuclear war.

“We are united by our belief that diplomacy is the only way to resolve the nuclear crisis and threat of war now facing the Korean Peninsula,” said their letter to Mr. Trump, dated Wednesday. “Peace is the most powerful deterrent of all.”

A copy of the letter, signed by hundreds of female leaders, was made available in advance. It was also being sent to several senators who visited the White House for the briefing, said Christine Ahn, international coordinator for [Women Cross DMZ](#), a group of female peace activists that helped organize the letter campaign.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis briefed the entire Senate at the White House on North Korea. The briefing also included Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence, and Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The briefing comes as the United States and its allies South Korea and Japan step up their military readiness amid signs the North is getting ready to test a nuclear device despite warnings by the United States and others not to do so.

“President Trump could demonstrate his art of deal making by advancing what will and has only ever worked: diplomacy and engagement,” Ms. Ahn said. “Talks with Pyongyang would be a real benchmark of success in his first 100 days.”

Ms. Ahn said the female peace activists prepared the letter campaign as “our own Scud missile” to stop what her group called a dangerous escalation of tensions. In the past weeks, Washington has vowed to stop the North’s advancing nuclear and missile programs, using military options if it has to, and moved the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson to Korean waters. The North has threatened its own pre-emptive strikes, warning of a nuclear war and conducting a series of missile tests.

The letter to Mr. Trump was also signed by the North’s Socialist Women’s Union. This was significant, Ms. Ahn said, because like other organizations in the North, it would not act independently of the wishes of the central government in Pyongyang.

• “The only so-called communication between Pyongyang and Washington is the threat of military force in the form of B-1 bombers, nuclear aircraft carriers, missiles and nuclear tests,” Kozue Akibayashi, the international president of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, was quoted as saying in a news release from Women Cross DMZ.

“This dangerous situation threatens everyone in the region.”

Ewa Eriksson Fortier, a Swedish humanitarian aid worker with extensive experience in North Korea, expressed concern that Mr. Trump may encourage more bilateral sanctions against North Korea, including restricting its supply of oil.

“We must caution against targeted sanctions, which harm the most vulnerable,” said Ms. Fortier, who signed the letter. “Ordinary community people need fuel to run tractors and machinery for disaster and flood prevention, and to secure access to food, safe water and sanitation.”

The women urged Mr. Trump to negotiate a freeze of North Korea’s nuclear and long-range ballistic program in exchange for a United States security guarantee that would include suspending United States-South Korea military exercises — an approach favored by China.

But they also urged Mr. Trump to address the root cause of the North Korean crisis by negotiating a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War, whose guns fell silent in a cease-fire in 1953 that left the peninsula still technically at war.

“For more than 70 years, isolation, arms, troops and doomsday threats have been used to separate a once unified country,” the American feminist activist and author Gloria Steinem said in the news release. “Isn’t it time that leaders stop, recognize danger and listen?”

In May 2015, Women Cross DMZ organized a group of 30 female peace activists, including Ms. Steinem and two Nobel Peace Prize laureates, to cross the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas to draw global attention to the need to bring peace on the divided peninsula.