

'A NEW HISTORY STARTS NOW'

They shared jokes, walked hand in hand, and embraced in an unprecedented display of friendship. In a historic summit laden with symbolism and unthinkable only months ago, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in agreed to pursue a permanent peace and the complete denuclearization of the divided peninsula.

Philippine Daily Inquirer · 28 Apr 2018 · A6 · STORY BY REUTERS AND AFP

SEOUL— In a historic summit laden with symbolism and an extraordinary display of friendship unthinkable only months ago, the leaders of North and South Korea agreed to pursue a permanent peace and the complete denuclearization of the divided peninsula.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Friday issued a declaration on “the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.”

Upon signing the document, the two leaders shared a warm embrace, the culmination of a summit filled with smiles and friendly gestures in front of the world’s media.

They also agreed that they would this year seek a permanent end to the Korean War, 65 years after the hostilities ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty.

Smiling and holding hands, Kim and Moon met at the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the countries on Friday in the first summit for the two Koreas in over a decade.

Joking while walking

Scenes of Moon and Kim joking and walking together marked a striking contrast to last year’s barrage of North Korean missile tests and its largest ever nuclear test that led to sweeping international sanctions and fears of a fresh conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

The dramatic meeting, aimed at ending their decadeslong conflict, comes weeks before Kim is due to meet US President Donald Trump to discuss denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

“We are at a starting line today, where a new history of peace, prosperity and inter-Korean relations is being written,” Kim said before the two Korean leaders and top aides began talks at the border truce village of Panmunjom.

During their private meeting, Kim told Moon he came to the summit to end the history of conflict and joked he was sorry for keeping Moon up with his late-night missile tests, a South Korean official said.

Panmunjom Declaration

Moon would visit Pyongyang in “the fall,” the two leaders said in the so-called Panmunjom Declaration, also agreeing to hold “regular meetings and direct telephone conversations.”

After the summit, Kim pledged that the two Koreas will ensure they did not “repeat the unfortunate history in which past inter-Korea agreements ... fizzled out after beginning.”

The two previous Korean summits in 2000 and 2007, both of them in Pyongyang, also ended with displays of affection and similar pledges, but the agreements ultimately came to naught.

After Friday’s talks that lasting more than an hour and a half behind closed doors, Kim was driven back to the North side just before noon in a black limousine flanked by guards who ran alongside. Crossing the border, the vehicle had to drive across a lawn, as there is not a road linking the two sides at that spot.

Following lunch, the two leaders ceremonially planted a memorial tree before resuming their meeting. They were expected to finish the evening with dinner and a film.

Just days before the summit, Kim said North Korea would suspend nuclear and long-range missile tests and dismantle its only known nuclear test site.

But there is widespread skepticism about whether Kim is ready to abandon the nuclear arsenal his country has defended and developed for decades as what it says is a necessary deterrent against US invasion.

Two earlier summits between the leaders of North and South Korea, in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007, failed to halt the North’s weapons programs or improve relations in a lasting way.

“Today, rather than create results we won’t be able to carry out like in the past, we should make good results by talking frankly about current issues, issues of interest,” Kim said.

First to cross the line

Moon greeted Kim at the military demarcation line, making Kim the first North Korean leader to set foot in the South since the 1950-1953 Korean War.

In an unplanned move, Kim invited Moon to step briefly across into North Korea, before the two leaders crossed back into South Korea holding hands.

“I was excited to meet at this historic place and it is really moving that you came all the way to the demarcation line to greet me in person,” Kim said.

“It was your big decision to make it here,” Moon said.

The two were handed flowers by South Korean children, residents of a village situated in the DMZ, and met on a red carpet by a South Korean honor guard in historical costumes playing traditional music.

Kim wore his trademark black Mao suit, while the rest of the North Korean delegation appeared in military uniforms or Western attire.

'Starting point of history'

"A new history starts now. An age of peace, from the starting point of history," Kim wrote in Korean in a guest book in the South's Peace House before talks began.

Minutes before Kim entered Peace House, a North Korean security team conducted a sweep for explosives and listening devices, and sprayed apparent disinfectant in the air, on the chairs and on the guest book.

The United States is hopeful talks will make progress on achieving peace and prosperity, the White House said in a statement as the two men began their summit.

The White House also said it looks forward to continuing discussions with South Korea in preparation for the planned meeting of Trump and Kim in the coming weeks.

Just months ago, Trump and Kim were trading threats and insults as the North made rapid advances in pursuit of nucleararmed missiles capable of hitting the US.

Last year Pyongyang carried out its sixth nuclear blast, by far its most powerful to date, and launched missiles capable of reaching the US mainland.

Seoul demonstrations

Moon traveled to the meeting in a large motorcade, stopping briefly to greet dozens of summit supporters waving South Korean flags near the presidential Blue House in Seoul.

Hundreds of demonstrators were seen gathering in downtown Seoul from early morning to protest or support the summit.

Impoverished North Korea and the rich, democratic South are technically still at war because the Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

The US stations 28,500 troops in South Korea as a legacy of the Cold War conflict, which pitted the South, the US and UN forces against the communist North, backed by China and Russia.

Kim and Trump are expected to meet in late May or June, with Trump saying on Thursday he was considering several possible dates and venues.