

## **AMBASSADORS CONNECT WITH AMERICA**

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In a speaking tour to seven major U.S. cities during May 3 through May 11, the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United States and the Ambassador of the United States to Korea described to highly interested audiences the common values and policies that underlie the alliance between the two countries. His Excellency Lee Tae-sik and The Honorable Alexander Vershbow devoted more than a week to the 2006 “Ambassadors Dialogue” program organized by KEI in conjunction with local partners in Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Detroit, St. Louis, and Boston.

### **Ambassador Lee’s Message**

Ambassador Lee underlined the significant development of the Korean economy and the closeness of the U.S.-Korea relationship, including the support by Korea of the United States in the major conflicts since the Korean War and in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as well as the substantial trade and investment links. With regard to Korea-U.S. cooperation in the military field, Ambassador Lee commented on the successful implementation of the realignment of U.S. Forces Korea. He said that the 43 U.S. bases currently scattered around the country will be consolidated into 17 bases, with valuable land returned to Korea in this process. Also, he commented that the advancement of military technology will allow a gradual reduction of U.S. Forces Korea.

On the political front, Ambassador Lee explained the significance of the launch of the Korea-U.S. ministerial level Strategic Dialogue, emphasizing that, through this channel, Korea and the United States will harness and focus the respective strengths of both societies to address pressing regional and global challenges. On the economic front, the Ambassador explained the significance of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Korea and the United States, which will be the largest FTA concluded by the United States since NAFTA. Ambassador Lee expressed conviction that a Korea-U.S. FTA would take the ROK-U.S. relationship to another level. Finally, Ambassador Lee commented on the joint efforts exerted by both countries to include Korea in the Visa Waiver Program.

The Ambassador explained the ROK policy of engagement with North Korea, the “Policy of Peace and Prosperity,” emphasizing that it is a calculated and graduated effort to change inter-Korean relations from that of confrontation to reconciliation. He said that ROK policy towards North Korea is geared to mutually reinforce progress in resolving the North Korea nuclear issue, and that Korea’s efforts to promote cooperation with the North is a source of leverage as North Korea gradually recognizes the benefits of cooperation. He also commented on the human rights situation in the North, noting the role of humanitarian assistance by the South and pointing out that it is transparent and monitored.

Ambassador Lee accorded high priority to acknowledging and thanking the U.S. veterans of the Korean War who attended many of the events for their role in “enabling the ROK to be what it is today.”

### **Ambassador Vershbow’s Message**

Ambassador Vershbow also commented on the evolution of the U.S.-ROK relationship, pointing out that it is being adjusted to reflect the significant changes in military technology and in the global strategic situation since the Korean War. He noted that ROK military forces are assuming a number of the responsibilities heretofore exercised by U.S. forces in Korea and said that these and other changes will promote the longer-term sustainability of the alliance. He commented on the agreement worked out regarding strategic flexibility of U.S. forces and suggested that this could evolve into a regional security architecture.

Regarding the challenges posed by North Korea’s nuclear program, Ambassador Vershbow emphasized the key role of the Six Party Talks and the September 2005 statement of principles, and said that the United States is cooperating closely with the ROK in trying to move them forward.

However, the Ambassador said that, in his view, the U.S.-ROK relationship will increasingly be defined by economic rather than security issues. He pointed to conclusions of economic analysts that a U.S.-ROK FTA

would produce enormous economic welfare gains for both countries and suggested that there could be substantial strategic benefits as well.

Ambassador Vershbow also commented on the profound societal changes in Korea, including the widespread view among the younger generations that North Korea should be seen as a poor relative in need of assistance rather than a serious threat. He commented on the status of efforts to enable the ROK to be included in the Visa Waiver Program. He asked his listeners not to be swayed by a few images of South Korean protesters into thinking that there is a significant anti-American tendency among the general population, noting that the majority of South Koreans support the alliance and the prospective FTA.