The Urgent Need for Dialogue and Regional Cooperation to Overcome Divisions and Prevent Armed Conflict: GPPAC Northeast Asia Statement on the occasion of GPPAC ISG meeting in Tokyo

Northeast Asia is full of divisions, facing increasing risks of heightening militarism and nuclear threats throughout the region. Military tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at an all-time high, with the escalation of military exercises including since the beginning of 2024 by the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States leading to a potential imminent crisis. All channels of communication between the two Koreas have been cut off since April 2023, and the 2018 Inter-Korean Military Agreement, the minimum safeguard against armed conflict, has been neutralised since November 2023. With all land, sea, and air buffer zones gone, the risk of an accidental conflict has increased dramatically. Residents living along the border between the two Koreas are impacted firsthand by the effects of this crisis, which also poses a threat to the lives and human security of people in the region. At the same time, the construction of a new US military facility at Henoko (Okinawa, Japan), disrespectful of the will of the people of Okinawa, exacerbates tensions and poses a further threat to regional peace.

Within this context, the Northeast Asia Regional Network of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC NEA), coordinated by the Japan-based international NGO Peace Boat, hosted a gathering of GPPAC’s International Steering Group in Tokyo between January 22-26, 2024, bringing together over 50 local peacebuilders from around the globe. Established in 2003, GPPAC is a global network of over 250 civil society organisations active in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Discussions by local peacebuilders during the week-long meeting emphasised the need for locally-led, long-term and inclusive efforts, and the power of solidarity, collective action, using the network approach as a foundation.

A key message that emerged was the pressing need for efforts in risk reduction, confidence-building and regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, particularly at this critical juncture.

To this end, GPPAC NEA calls for an immediate stop to all military action, including military buildup, on and around the Korean Peninsula. We urge for dialogue channels to be restored, in order to avoid misunderstandings and dangerous accidents and to prevent armed conflict and even a potential nuclear disaster. We underscore the vital importance of exchange between people of the region to overcome divisions and build peace and reconciliation.

GPPAC NEA is a unique and inclusive platform to pursue such efforts in a sustained way, acting as a safe umbrella for civil society to come together and create lasting connections, even during high political tensions. This is embodied in the Ulaanbaatar Process, our civil society dialogue for peace and stability in Northeast Asia. We will continue to work with partners in the GPPAC network and beyond in pursuit of dialogue and regional cooperation to overcome divisions and prevent armed conflict, and create a peaceful and sustainable future.

January 26, 2024
On behalf of GPPAC NEA members attending the GPPAC ISG meeting in Tokyo,
Endorsed by the GPPAC International Steering Group