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## **President Yoon Suk Yeol Attends the 1<sup>st</sup> North Korean Defectors' Day Ceremony**

- Respect for the courage to pursue freedom
- Happiness of the North Korean defectors brings unification closer
- Never repatriate North Koreans come to the ROK back to the North
- Three promises for the North Korean defectors; Settlement, Capability, and Harmony

On July 14th, President Yoon Suk Yeol attended the inaugural ceremony of 「North Korean Defectors' Day」 at the Yeongbingwan in Cheong Wa Dae. This day was established as a promise by President Yoon during a Cabinet meeting on January 16, 2024 to warmly embrace North Korean defectors and encourage their successful settlement in the Republic of Korea. This marks the first time in history for the ROK administration to hold a ceremony commemorating North Korean defectors' day.

After declaring the opening of the event, President Yoon awarded for merit to honor those who contributed to supporting North Korean defectors. Kim Sung-min, the representative of Free North Korea Radio (awarded the Order of Civil Merit Dongbaek Medal), Im Hyun-soo, the director of the Global Union Mission Training Center (awarded the Civil Merit Medal), and Ma Soon-hee, the representative of Hakmaeul Self-help Group (awarded the Presidential

Citation) were recognized for their contributions. Additionally, President Yoon acknowledged and praised the “With Volunteers,” a volunteer group composed of residents from both North and South Korea, with a Presidential Citation.

In his commemorative speech, emphasizing the significance of establishing ‘North Korean Defectors’ Day’, President Yoon expressed respect and encouragement to the 34,000 North Korean defectors by acknowledging their arduous journey from North Korea and the new lives they are building. President Yoon also mentioned that North Korean defectors, through their noble journey towards freedom, have shown us how the freedom we enjoy can profoundly change the destiny and course of people’s lives.

President Yoon criticized inhumane actions of the North Korean regime and paid tribute to those who perished during their escape from North Korea. President Yoon pledged unwavering efforts to ensure that compatriots who escaped from North Korea can be embraced by the Republic of Korea.

President Yoon especially recalled the first-ever government publication of ‘Report on North Korean Human Rights’ in March of last year. He emphasized that resolving the North Korean human rights issue is a crucial foundation for achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula and for unified Korea, and that embracing North Korean defectors is the first step toward this goal. Additionally, President Yoon proposed three promises — ‘Settlement,’ ‘Capability,’ and ‘Harmony’ — so that the Republic of Korea can become a place of hope for North Korean defectors.

President Yoon first announced that he would establish a comprehensive national protection and support system to enable North Korean defectors to ‘settle’ stably. He promised to drastically improve the initial settlement support fund, which remains at the level of year 2005, and to support asset formation through the ‘Future Happiness Account.’ He expressed his willingness to implement child-care services for the female defectors, who make up the

majority of North Korean defectors, and to institutionalize support for the upbringing and education of their children, not only for those born in North Korea, but also for those born in third countries or domestically in the Republic of Korea.

Second, President Yoon pledged to support ‘capability’ building of North Korean defectors. President Yoon noted that the overall employment situation for North Korean defectors needs an improvement and stated that the government, local authorities, and public institutions would take the lead in providing employment opportunities for them. Moreover, the President explained his plan to provide incentives, such as tax credits, to private companies that employ North Korean defectors, ensuring they can secure good jobs in the private sector as well.

Lastly, President Yoon showed his determination to create a future of ‘harmony’ where North Korean defectors are free from discrimination and can fully enjoy their freedom and happiness. The President introduced the mentoring programs offered by the National Unification Advisory Council that started from this year in earnest and mentioned that he will support fostering self-reliant communities where earlier North Korean defectors would assist newcomers.

Furthermore, President Yoon underscored that the ROK government would not turn a blind eye to the suffering of North Korean compatriots under North Korean regime, and would exert all diplomatic efforts to prevent forced repatriation of North Korean defectors abroad.

Finally, the President stated that true unification will be achieved when North Korean defectors and the Republic of Korea become one and creating a ‘unification of people.’ He expressed his belief that the first North Korean Defectors' Day would bring forward the ‘day of freedom and unification’ for everyone.

Following the President's commemorative speech, the event continued with several performances: ▲ North Korean defectors sharing their dream story (“I Have a Dream”) ▲ A presentation of commitment to unification by a North Korean defectors (“Envisioning Unification”) ▲ A choir performance featuring both South Korean and North Korean defector youths.

Today's event was attended by over 200 people, including the first North Korean defector who entered the ROK with family; North Korean defectors of youth, cultural artists, government advisors; North Korean defector mentees and mentors from the National Unification Advisory Council; officials of alternative schools for North Korean defector youths; and related members of the National Assembly. From the government, Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho and Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul were present. From the Office of the President, Director of National Security Jang Ho-jin, First Deputy Director of National Security Kim Tae-hyo, and Senior Secretary to the President for Civil and Social Agenda Jeon Kwang-sam attended.

Meanwhile, after the ceremony, President Yoon attended the send-off ceremony at the Yeongbingwan in Cheong Wa Dae for the ‘Challengers,’ a baseball team of young North Korean defectors, who will visit the United States from July 18 to July 29. President Yoon wished them a successful trip and offered his encouragement.

President Yoon greeted each of the ‘Challengers’ youth, who have learned about challenge and hope through baseball despite facing many difficulties after arriving in the Republic of Korea. President Yoon congratulated them on their journey to the birthplace of baseball, the United States, as future national team players of a free and unified Korea.

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