

2025 East Asia Quadrilateral Dialogue

Joint Statement

We, the three host institutions; Korea Diplomacy Plaza (KDP), the New Diplomacy Initiative (ND) and the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) have gathered together again with colleagues from China at the East Asia Quadrilateral Dialogue in Tokyo to advance a new era of inclusive public diplomacy in East Asia. We first met here in 2023 and issued a statement affirming a shared understanding, common goals, and principles for joint action. Last year, on the very day citizens in Korea halted the imposition of martial law, we drafted, but could not issue, our second joint statement in Seoul, expressing our collective call for peace while the atmosphere remained tense.

We later came to understand that it was not only Korean democracy that was endangered at that moment. Those who plotted martial law sought to justify it by invoking the threat posed by North Korea, while simultaneously provoking tensions that risked igniting war. This crisis demonstrated that defending democracy is essential to preventing war and maintaining peace. The power of citizens who protect democratic institutions is, therefore, a pillar of peace. As civil society organizations, we are strengthened and encouraged by this lesson, reaffirming our commitment to model and encourage responsible leadership in our respective countries.

Yet the risks of war in our region have not diminished. On the Korean Peninsula, military coordination among the United States, South Korea, and Japan continues in ways perceived as threatening by North Korea and China. In response, North Korea, China, and Russia have increased their strategic and military cooperation. That same coordination is increasing the risk of a military conflict over Taiwan. Military spending among all parties is accelerating at a pace without precedent in recent decades. Meanwhile, U.S. unilateralism is destabilizing the international order and weakening prospects for multilateral cooperation. In Japan, domestic political developments have contributed to intensified regional tensions, despite modest efforts under the previous administration to widen the diplomatic channel between China and Japan.

In Gaza, even a fragile ceasefire has not alleviated the humanitarian emergency. In Ukraine, peace remains distant and the risk of escalation persists. The mass suffering in Gaza challenges the moral foundations of our global community, while the drone warfare in Ukraine signals the destructive potential of rapidly advancing military technologies. At the root of these crises is an approach to international affairs driven by geopolitical zero-sum thinking, amplified by those who profit from perpetual insecurity. This worldview prevents effective cooperation on urgent global challenges such as the climate crisis. It has become clear that great power competition does not offer a path to peace.

In our previous statement, we warned that geopolitical competition intensifies the climate crisis, accelerates arms races, and destabilizes economies — ultimately failing to secure the safety of any nation. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting more inclusive and cooperative approaches to the shared challenges we must face together. We are encouraged that our dialogue now includes members of the Japanese and South Korean parliaments, expanding democratic participation in foreign policy.

We recognize that East Asia and the world are entering a period of complex and interconnected crises. The way forward is not intensified rivalry, but a diplomatic architecture that manages risk, shares responsibility, and builds practical channels of dialogue. Peace is not merely a matter of intention — peace is a structure. Security does not arise from military dominance, but from relationships rooted in risk-managed interdependence.

To help realize this vision, we will continue to institutionalize networks linking civil society, parliaments, and policy experts. This includes establishing the East Asia Quadrilateral Dialogue as an annual, permanent forum, expanding to include youth and university networks, and creating an open-access digital platform for collaborative research. When governments hesitate or retreat, Track II diplomacy led by citizens, experts and lawmakers will sustain the framework of peace.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings, the 60th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-Korea relations, and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, where non-aligned nations advanced an alternative to great power confrontation. These legacies remind us that war and nuclear devastation must never be repeated in East Asia. With this conviction, we issue this joint statement. For the generations to come, we will manage competition, reduce risks, and build peace.

Peace is not one choice among many.
Peace is the structure we build together.

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