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## Status of Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation and Outlook for 2021

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### English Abstract

In 2020, inter-Korean relations continued to be strained, and inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects also stagnated following the year of 2019. COVID-19 was a major reason for stagnation in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects this year, but in a long-term perspective, it was North Korea's reluctance to respond to and cooperate with South Korea due to the South Korean government's passive attitude and delayed progress even towards the projects that the two leaders of Korea have agreed on since 2018.

It is very unlikely that the conditions surrounding the inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects will improve quickly in 2021. Unless the COVID-19 situation ameliorates dramatically, cooperative projects will proceed in a limited manner. At the same time, however, the prolonged COVID-19 may serve as an opportunity to identify the necessity for internal exchange and cooperation projects centered on the public health and medical sectors.

If the current deadlock between the two Koreas continues in 2021, the South Korean government should use the inter-Korean exchange and cooperation project as a momentum for the transition of inter-Korean relations while promoting projects that can be expanded to other areas simultaneously. In this regard, humanitarian cooperation projects such as public health and medical cooperation, which can be carried out under

the continued sanctions against North Korea, should be promoted first. And at the same time, the government could prepare mid-to-long-term plans to expand projects to other areas of cooperation such as environment sectors, and further seek to diversify participants of the project by engaging with Northeast Asian states including the two Koreas.

As such, the South Korean government should be able to utilize this time as an opportunity to generate fruitful results and develop trust by proactively presenting realistic measures to comply with the agreements that the two Korean leaders have reached and resume inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects as a crucial part of the plan. ❖

*※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

*※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*