

‘AN AWFULLY LONG TIME’: ESTABLISHING NEW ZEALAND-NORTH KOREAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS¹

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New Zealand’s establishment of diplomatic relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (the DPRK or North Korea) was a challenging and lengthy experience. Indeed, North Korea was the final East Asian country where relations were established. A major strand of New Zealand’s policy towards the North until 2001 was the withholding of diplomatic relations, despite numerous approaches. During the Cold War this policy was primarily shaped by the view that Pyongyang’s diplomacy was aggressive and unsophisticated (and thus needed to change before diplomatic relations were established), the prioritising of relations with Seoul, and the stance of friends and allies. Pyongyang and its supporters also faced challenges organising promotional activities. The reluctance to establish relations declined during the post-Cold War years with encouragement from Seoul, easing Korean Peninsula tensions prompting other countries to engage with the North, increased unofficial interaction, the hope of better presenting Wellington’s viewpoint and concerns to Pyongyang, and potential economic opportunities. Underpinning these factors was New Zealand’s desire to act constructively as a regional member with others for peace and security.

Formative Years: 1970s

The decade started with an unplanned August 1971 meeting between the DPRK Consul-General in Singapore and New Zealand’s High Commissioner. The Consul-General asked if DPRK journalists could visit later that year to help “establish greater understanding” between both countries, but was told this was “highly unlikely.” The meeting occurred because the North Koreans, who simply said they represented the ‘Republic of Korea’, were mistaken for South Koreans. The High Commissioner labelled this a “ruse” to “confuse simple-minded heads of mission such as myself.”

1 The New Zealand Government’s perspective is primarily illustrated via Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Immigration Service and Security Intelligence Service archival material. The activities of the New Zealand-DPRK Society (the Society) that promotes relations are outlined through using Society archives. This material is supplemented by interviews. Please note that the views expressed here are not necessarily those of the author’s employer or those organisations and individuals that assisted. He is most grateful to the Ministry (particularly Neil Robertson), Department of Labour, Archives New Zealand, Security Intelligence Service, Reverend Don Borrie, Professor Bill Willmott, and interviewees for their kind assistance. For a more in-depth analysis of relations see the author’s chapter in the forthcoming Korea book edited by Kenneth Wells.

He apologised for his “diplomatic indiscretion,” and any embarrassment caused by meeting the “wrong” Korean representative. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarked that “sooner or later we may have to let some North Koreans pay us a visit, but for the moment it does not seem to us to be a particularly appropriate time.... In any case it can do no harm to let them knock a few more times on our door.”²

The DPRK Ambassador in China unofficially met Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Walding during his 1973 Chinese visits.³ Walding had led a small mission to Peking in March aimed at establishing ministerial-level contact with China, and been asked by the Chinese to meet the Ambassador. According to mission member Chris Elder, after their arrival the Chinese asked if Walding would meet with the DPRK Ambassador. “This was a bit embarrassing as we did not have diplomatic relations, but we did not want to disoblige our hosts, so it was decided that the Ambassador could pay an unofficial call on Mr Walding at the guest house where we were staying.” A “highlight” for New Zealand officials during their unofficial meeting was when Walding, “having been deluged with references to Our Great Leader, Kim Il Sung [Kim Il sŏng], said gravely that he would refer what he had heard to his Great Leader, [Prime Minister] Norman Kirk.”⁴ In December 1973 the decision was made to form an independent society to promote bilateral relations, and the New Zealand-DPRK Society was established in March 1974.⁵ Leading members included Wolfgang Rosenberg, William Willmott and Reverend Don Borrie. With the Society’s assistance a DPRK cultural exhibition visited later that year.⁶ Another delegation arrived during August 1978, but its reported political activities were controversial.⁷ In 1979 Labour Party member of Parliament (MP) Warren Freer visited North Korea.⁸

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Singapore High Commissioner, 17 September 1971, 59/324/1 part 1; and Singapore High Commissioner to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 18 August 1971, 59/324/1 part 1.

3 ‘NZ seems in no hurry to establish links in North Korea’, *Evening Post* [EP] 28 August 1974, p.33; ‘Possible visit to New Zealand by North Korean table tennis team’, 16 August 1973, 59/519/6 part 1; and ‘Possible visit to New Zealand by North Korean table tennis team’, 27 August 1973, 59/519/6 part 1.

4 Correspondence with Chris Elder, 25 February 2013.

5 Wolfgang Rosenberg to Bill Willmott, 1 March 1974, MB399/19 Box 2; and Rosenberg to Willmott, 8 February 1974, MB399/19 Box 2.

6 Rosenberg to Willmott, 1 March 1974; ‘Korea Society formed’, *The Press*, 25 March 1974, p.10; ‘JA Walding to W Rosenberg’, 24 May 1974, 59/519/6 part 1; and Willmott, 2 August 1974, MB399/8 Box 1.

7 Don Borrie to O Son Muk, 14 June 1978, MB399/20 Box 2; ‘Reds rumbled as they hide true mission’, *New Zealand Truth*, 1 August 1978, p.2; and ‘Proposed visit by North Korean delegation’, 20 May 1974, 22/1/390 part 1.

8 ‘Freer opens up N Korean door’, *Evening Post*, 21 August 1979, p.8.

Formative Years: 1980s

Wellington remained reluctant to strengthen relations during the following decade. Despite this, New Zealanders such as Freer (1980) visited the DPRK.⁹ The North offered to help fund a Society bulletin, and hoped Auckland, Nelson and Timaru branches would be established.¹⁰ The Society's first large-scale study tour visited in May 1982.¹¹ The Society aimed to "prod" the Labour Party and trade unions to make statements on North Korea, while the "seduction of tours to North Korea should be held out."¹² In 1983 it was suggested various MPs visit; Russell Marshall, Helen Clark and Fran Wilde were identified as possible candidates.¹³ Pyongyang was "most concerned to have further first hand contact with key Labour politicians."¹⁴ Margaret Shields expressed a willingness to visit but the planned itinerary did not suit the DPRK, much to the Society's disappointment.¹⁵ In 1984 another Society tour occurred, its leader noting that North Korea "apparently had a very happy, healthy society." However, he had unanswered questions including: were there dissenters and what happened to them?¹⁶ That year the first New Zealand journalist visited.¹⁷

North Korea actively pursued better relations with the fourth Labour Government. The North was interested in imports ranging from coal to milk powder, while offering manufactured clothing along with railway and hydroelectric equipment.¹⁸ Prime Minister David Lange opposed stronger relations but some MPs questioned this position.¹⁹ Jim Anderton during 1985 remarked that it was in New Zealand's interests to have friendly relations with all Pacific Rim nations, including North Korea.²⁰ Clark

9 Kin Song Sin to Willmott, 10 February 1983 MB399/20 Box 1.

10 Society report on meeting held by Korea-New Zealand Society and New Zealand-DPRK Society in Pyongyang 25 May 1982, 22 June 1982, MB399/5 Box 1.

11 Minutes of Society executive meeting, 18 June 1982, MB399/5 Box 1; and Kim Song Sin to Stuart Payne, 20 April 1983, MB399/16 Box 1.

12 Minutes of Society's National Executive, 9 June 1980, MB399/15 Box 1.

13 Minutes of Society Committee meeting, 19 January 1982, MB399/5 Box 1; Minutes of Society Executive, 29 March 1983, MB399/5 Box 1; and Helen Clark to Willmott, 12 March 1982, MB399/16 Box 1.

14 Borrie to Stuart Payne, 24 March 1983, MB399/5 Box 1.

15 Minutes of Society meeting, 24 September 1983, MB399/5 Box 1; Willmott to Kim Song Sin, 25 June 1983, MB399/16 Box 1; Kim Song Sin, 4 August 1983, MB399/16 Box 1; and Willmott to Kim Song Sin, 29 August 1983, MB399/16 Box 1.

16 Bob Consedine report on May 1984 visit to North Korea, MB399/18 Box 2.

17 'North Korean visit by NZ writer a first', *Press*, 27 June 1984, p.25.

18 Borrie to Minister of Trade Mike Moore, 30 October 1984, MB399/16 Box 1.

19 'NZ: Relations with North Korea', 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1; and 'Relations with North Korea', 23 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

20 Jim Anderton to Willmott, 3 October 1985, MB399/6 Box 1.

in 1986 asked Lange, “Is there any reason why New Zealand policy now appears to be much more restrictive on this matter [relations with the North] than it was over a decade ago?”²¹ The following year she exclaimed, “I cannot myself see what the problem is in permitting DPRK people to begin to visit on cultural or trade delegations.”²² In similar vein she added, “Heaven knows why we are so timid when other Western countries seem able to establish relations with Pyongyang.”²³

New Zealand’s position became somewhat more relaxed as Cold War tensions declined. Lange in 1987 said that despite an official trade mission to the North not being possible there were no trade restrictions, and a private trade mission would not be discouraged. If DPRK visits to New Zealand were for genuine reasons and not merely for propaganda they could occur.²⁴ At the decade’s end the Government reviewed visits.²⁵

Understanding Wellington’s Caution

North Korean Foreign Policy

The primary factor behind the reluctance to build relations was opposition to Pyongyang’s foreign policy set against the Cold War’s background, especially because of Peninsula commitments. Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Sir Keith Holyoake referred to the North’s unwillingness to deal with the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea), and to resume dialogue on peaceful reunification, when visas were denied in early 1976.²⁶ According to Holyoake, if the North “demonstrates that it is disposed to play its part as a responsible member of the international community, New Zealand will be happy to establish diplomatic relations.”²⁷ Similar attitudes continued under the fourth Labour Government.²⁸ In 1987 Lange said relations were essentially withheld because the DPRK and its friends refused to have relations with the South, and blocked it from entering the United Nations (UN).²⁹

21 Helen Clark to David Lange, 13 October 1986, MB399/6, Box 1.

22 Clark to Willmott, 1 May 1987, MB399/6, Box 1.

23 Clark to Willmott, 6 October 1987, MB399/6, Box 1.

24 ‘NZ: Relations with North Korea’, 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1; ‘Relations with North Korea’, 23 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1; and Lange to Willmott, 30 April 1987, MB399/6 Box 1.

25 ‘North Korea: Facilitation of informal contact’, 1 March 1989, 22/1/390 part 1.

26 ‘Why NZ will not let in N Koreans’, *Press*, 7 April 1976, p.1.

27 Keith Holyoake to Rosenberg, 4 August 1976, MB399/16 Box 1.

28 ‘NZ: Relations with North Korea’, 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

29 Lange to Borrie, 3 February 1987, MB399/6 Box 1; and Lange to Willmott, 30 April 1987, MB399/6 Box 1.

Officials viewed North Korean diplomacy as unsophisticated and aggressive. This reinforced negative perceptions and caused frustration. In 1975 the Jakarta Embassy compared discussions with the DPRK Ambassador to mounting “the old treadmill” where both parties “pedalled hard without result,” and notified Wellington that the DPRK Ambassador had said “We have no fear of the South Koreans (wide show of Grandma’s big teeth).”³⁰ Attempts to change New Zealand’s policy on Korea at the UN caused additional criticism.³¹ The following year the Bangkok Embassy was advised of the “likely fruitlessness” of accepting North Korean calls.³² Moreover, the 1978 delegation’s reported political activities and the South’s statement the visitors had disguised their status to enter encouraged the March 1980 refusal of visas.³³ During the 1980s Wellington continued to call for political steps to defuse tensions and criticised the North.³⁴

Bellicose activities increased New Zealand’s caution. Support for better relations, such as to help unite Asia, was eroded by the 1974 attempt to assassinate the ROK President.³⁵ Two years later DPRK diplomats left three Scandinavian countries and Finland after revelations of illegal activities. The Government felt “some, if not most, of the more serious misdemeanours” appeared to be “directed towards raising funds to cover embassy expenses, and presumably were sanctioned by the North Korean regime.”³⁶ Lange recognised that more open contacts with the North would enable New Zealand to help demonstrate the need for dialogue rather than confrontation, and allow it to directly express its “abhorrence” of terrorism. However, this was outweighed by the need for North Korea and its friends to change their policy.³⁷ Aggressive attempts to strengthen relations with South Pacific island states caused further concern, although Pyongyang appeared less interested in exporting revolutionary ideology than in competing with the South for recognition.³⁸ Nor was a policy change likely to be encouraged by criticism of the Government and ROK by the DPRK and the Society.³⁹

30 ‘Relations with North Korea’, 28 May 1975, 236/1/2 part 1; and ‘Korea’, 4 October 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

31 ‘Korea’, 4 October 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

32 ‘Contacts with North Korean representatives’, 26 July 1976, 236/1/2 part 1.

33 ‘*New Zealand Truth*; ‘Muldoon supports South’, *Dominion*, 14 March 1980, p.12; and ‘Talboys refuses meeting’, *Dominion*, 15 March 1980, p.3.

34 Minister of Foreign Affairs, Press statement, 27 January 1982.

35 Wellington to Kuala Lumpur, 17 December 1973, 203/2/100 part 1; and ‘Death of Madam Park Chung-Hee’, Prime Minister’s Office, 16 August 1974.

36 ‘North Korean Embassy misdemeanours’, 23 November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

37 Lange to Borrie, 3 February 1987, MB399/6 Box 1; and Lange to Willmott, 30 April 1987, MB399/6 Box 1.

38 ‘Washington to Wellington’, 23 November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

39 ‘Asian models’, *Salient*, 11 September 1978, p.3; ‘Korean journalists write to Tribune’, *New Zealand Tribune*, 26 July 1976, p.7; ‘No one will miss Park’, *EP*, 29 October 1979, p.7; and ‘Iron curtain’ round NZ’, *Press*, 2 April 1980, p.21.

The Society and DPRK themselves faced challenges promoting relations. Communication was problematic with serious concern expressed over unanswered and lost correspondence.⁴⁰ Indeed, Freer during 1982 declined a Society invitation to be its patron by noting the North's lack of response to his trade efforts.⁴¹ The Society said it felt "rather betrayed" by the DPRK's inaction, and later that the North's material "should be much less emotional."⁴² After Pyongyang rejected the Society's proposed 1984 trade union visit a leader complained that the North Koreans were "trying to tell us what to do in our own country," and their focus on the establishment of other branches was "narrow minded."⁴³ In 1985 the North applied for visas without consulting the Society, while providing incomplete delegation details late.⁴⁴ Moreover, Willmott said, "We are growing alarmed at the way Pyongyang completely ignores our cables, to say nothing of our letters," and expressed doubt there would ever be effective communication.⁴⁵ The Society also rejected the North's suggestion that it be called the New Zealand Democratic People's Republic of Korea Friendship and Solidarity Society, as the name's political connotations would be "repugnant to many people."⁴⁶

Importance of South Korea

The ROK's position was a major factor shaping policy. At the 1971 meeting in Singapore the High Commissioner had explained New Zealand's "long-standing and friendly relationship" with Seoul. Wellington accordingly was "putting a great deal of effort into widening its already close contacts with the ROK." Indeed, the High Commissioner feared he might have overdone his profuse praise for the ROK, but it did discourage further discussion. The DPRK "accepted this" with regret.⁴⁷ Kirk's indication that a gradual opening of new relations was sought included the acknowledgement that any decision to establish diplomatic relations would be influenced by consultation with other interested countries such as the ROK.⁴⁸ The Ministry felt that an "adverse

40 Kim Song Sin to Willmott, 4 August 1983, MB399/16, Box 1; Kim Song Sin to Willmott, 10 March 1986, MB399/1 Box 1; and Stuart Payne to Kim Song Sin, 14 September 1987, MB399/1 Box 1.

41 Warren Freer to Willmott, 3 December 1982, MB299/15 Box 1.

42 Society report on meeting held by Korea-New Zealand Society and New Zealand-DPRK Society in Pyongyang 25 May 1982, 22 June 1982, MB399/5 Box 1; Willmott to Freer, 22 December 1982, MB299/15 Box 1; and Willmott to Kim Song Sin, 22 December 1982, MB399/8 Box 1.

43 Willmott to Leon, 25 April 1984, MB399/3 Box 1.

44 Stuart Payne to Kim Song Sin, 4 November 1985, MB399/1 Box 1.

45 Willmott to Australia-DPRK Committee, 16 November 1985, MB399/17 Box 2.

46 Willmott to Kim Song Sin, 11 November 1985, MB399/1 Box 1.

47 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Singapore High Commissioner, 17 September 1971, 59/324/1 part 1; and Singapore High Commissioner to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 18 August 1971, 59/324/1 part 1.

48 *EP*, 28 August 1974.

reaction” from the South was possible over the 1974 visit. However, Seoul was “well aware” of moves towards establishing relations “at a suitable time” and not at their expense.⁴⁹ Close relations with the South were also given priority by Prime Minister Robert Muldoon.⁵⁰

The South remained sensitive towards New Zealand-DPRK relations in the 1980s. Its Ambassador claimed the North was attempting to ‘mislead’ New Zealanders through a 1980 *Listener* advertisement promoting the regime.⁵¹ In response to Anderton asking about the 1985 refusal of a delegation, the Ministry noted that successive governments had determined that relations with the North should not be strengthened out of consideration for relations with the South. Likewise, Seoul would view any change a significant gesture to the North.⁵² DPRK visits were reviewed in 1989 as Seoul sought to address peninsular tensions, and supported some modest gestures to reduce the North’s isolation.⁵³

Other Countries

Finally, policy was influenced by friends and allies. Australia’s experiences were especially relevant. When Canberra established diplomatic relations with the DPRK in 1974, it believed New Zealand was interested in recognising the North at the same time.⁵⁴ Although some in Wellington felt that New Zealand was “moving quietly in this direction,” it was considered tactically better to wait longer so as not to “identify New Zealand’s policy with Australia.”⁵⁵ The US was “most unenthusiastic” over the establishment of diplomatic relations, and Canberra received a “rather cold response” from Japan.⁵⁶ The South was “extremely upset,” and “leaning over backwards” to make it clear Australia was “in disfavour.”⁵⁷ Seoul made a “strong plea” for New Zealand to

49 ‘Mr Chi has one of those weeks’, *Press*, 3 August 1974, p.1; and ‘Proposed visit by North Korean delegation’, 20 May 1974, 59/519/6 part 1.

50 ‘High-powered welcome for South Korean PM’, *EP*, 4 May 1979, p.4; and ‘North Korea a divisive peace factor’, *EP*, 4 May 1979, p.4.

51 ‘Peace in Korea’, *NZ Listener*, 23 August 1980, p11; and ‘Peace in Korea’, *NZ Listener*, 2 August 1980, p.24.

52 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Jim Anderton, 31 October 1985, MB399/17 Box 2.

53 ‘Relations with the DPRK’, 4 January 1989, 22/1/390 part 1; and ‘London to Wellington’, 3 March 1989, 22/1/390 part 1.

54 Australian High Commission, Wellington, 15 December 1973, 203/2/100 part 1; ‘Australian recognition of DPRK’, 17 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1; and ‘Australian relations with North Asia’, 17 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1.

55 Wellington to Kuala Lumpur, 17 December 1973, 203/2/100 part 1.

56 ‘Australian recognition of DPRK’, 23 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1; and ‘Australian recognition of DPRK’, 22 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1.

57 ‘Australian relations with DPRK’, Australian High Commission, Wellington, 22 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1; and ‘Australian recognition of North Korea’, 22 March 1974, 203/2/100 part 1.

to dissuade Australia. Indeed, the ROK reportedly threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Australia, a move New Zealand opposed.⁵⁸ As it happened, the DPRK suddenly and controversially withdrew its diplomats in October 1975.⁵⁹

The New Zealand Government during the 1980s remained keenly aware of the potential impact increased interaction might have on the perceptions of other countries. The decision to deny a cultural delegation entry in 1985 was influenced by “a real risk of being misunderstood internationally” if it appeared closer relations were developing.⁶⁰ The 1989 review of contact occurred as countries including the UK and Australia considered greater contact with Pyongyang.⁶¹

Increased Interaction: 1990s

Semi-official dialogue occurred against the backdrop of the Cold War’s dramatic end and greater ROK-DPRK interaction. The importance of dialogue in resolving peninsular issues was increasingly recognised as other countries showed interest in engagement.⁶² In 1990 a DPRK delegation met Labour Party members, while three North Koreans visited for an ice-skating conference.⁶³ By 1991 the Society’s newsletter was mailed to about 45 people, and the North later congratulated the Society on its 20th anniversary for the “great deal of work” promoting relations.⁶⁴ A Whitireia Performing Arts Group staged the largest New Zealand visit to date in 1993, and DPRK delegations arrived.⁶⁵ For example, a 1996 delegation met figures such as Keith Locke, and was considered successful.⁶⁶

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- 58 Seoul to Wellington, 23 January 1974, 203/2/100 part 1; and New Zealand Embassy, Seoul, 22 February 1974, 203/2/100 part 1.
- 59 ‘Australia-DPRK relations’, November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DPRK country brief’, April 2011, available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/dprk/dprk_brief.html; and ‘Australian Embassy shut down’, *New Zealand Herald* [NZH], 7 November 1975, p.1.
- 60 ‘North Korea: Cultural delegations’, 24 December 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.
- 61 ‘Policy guidance – Relations with the DPRK’, 4 November 1986, 22/1/390 part 1; ‘London to Wellington’, 3 March 1989; and Adrian Buzo, ‘The 21 year freeze: Australia’s relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1997, 51 (1), p.30.
- 62 Paul Bellamy, ‘Preparing for an uncertain Korean future’, *New Zealand International Review* [NZIR], November/December 2011, 36 (6), p.17.
- 63 Interview with Graham Kelly, 5 December 2011 and correspondence, 13 December 2011; and *Society Newsletter*, November 1990, MB399/2 Box 1.
- 64 Stuart Payne to Society, 25 August 1991, MB 399/2 Box 1; and Korea-New Zealand Friendship Society to New Zealand DPRK Society, 25 February 1994.
- 65 John Burke, letter to North Korea, 1 April 1993.
- 66 Choe Jong Hwan and Pak Yong Gun to Borrie, 12 October 1996.

Relations were frequently discussed. North Korea told Borrie during 1992 that it actively sought joint venture partners in areas including fishing and agriculture along with sporting links.⁶⁷ Minyi Trading Company representatives visited to investigate commercial and investment opportunities.⁶⁸ The North said that economic relations could involve performing artists visiting New Zealand, and a trade delegation going to the North.⁶⁹ Feltex, the Meat Producers Board, Apple and Pear Marketing Board and Wool Board expressed interest in trade, although there was concern over the North's financial position.⁷⁰ During the mid-1990s DPRK proposals included a 60 day cultural exhibition, a traditional medicine delegation, garment manufacturing deals, along with joint business ventures such as restaurants and art galleries.⁷¹ Visits to the North included New Zealand Post (1991), the Forestry Corporation (1995), and Computer Network Design Limited (1997).⁷² A Porirua City and Wonsan City sister-city relationship was advocated, while the North sought information on groups like the Socialist Unity Party.⁷³

Yet considerable challenges remained. Communication was sometimes difficult with both the DPRK and Society members frankly discussing this. A senior Society member resigned in 1991 after expressing their frustration with communication. The Society further noted the challenge of relations with the DPRK Government who "insist on us being a voice piece for their policies and propaganda."⁷⁴ Relations between the 1992 delegation and Society were sometimes tense.⁷⁵ That year coal for the North was delayed by the vessel *Offi Gloria* being under legal dispute.⁷⁶ The Society only ascertained that an exhibition team would visit immediately prior to arriving in 1996, and the team did not follow advice regarding its itinerary.⁷⁷ The Society was critical of the poor response to a proposed University of Victoria visit, and "most concerned"

67 Borrie, 'An update on the DPRK', 22 May 1992, MB399/2, Box 1.

68 Borrie, report on the Minyi Trading Company visit, 4 July 1992, MB399/2 Box 1.

69 Borrie, 11 May 1993.

70 Feltex to Borrie 30 March 1993; New Zealand Apple and Pear Marketing Board to Borrie, 30 March 1993; New Zealand Wool Board, 30 March 1993; and New Zealand Meat Producers Board, 31 March 1993.

71 Choi Jong Hun to Borrie, 12 June 1994; Choi Jong Hun to Borrie, 14 December 1994; Choi Jong Hun to Borrie, 25 February 1994; Borrie, letter to the Warehouse, 13 April 1994; Choi Jong Hun to Borrie, 4 May 1994; and Korea Puksong Trading Corporation to Borrie, 4 April 1996.

72 'NZ/North Korea Relations', 4 September 1997, 58/519/1; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'North Korea Contacts', 2010.

73 'Porirua wanted as Wonsan's sister city', *EP*, 11 May 1994, p.2; Choe Jong Hun to Borrie, 30 January 1997; and Ri Kang Chol to Borrie, 25 February 1998.

74 Stuart Payne to Society, 25 August 1991, MB 399/2 Box 1.

75 Borrie, report on the Minyi Trading Company visit, 4 July 1992, MB399/2 Box 1.

76 'Offi Gloria given time', *Press*, 30 May 1992, p.2.

77 Choe Jong Hun to Borrie, 9 April 1996.

that an academic could not visit in 1998.⁷⁸ Borrie told the North that items brought by exhibition groups were unsuitable, and noted the poor financial performance of exhibitions.⁷⁹ The Ministry commented that DPRK delegations were “ill-equipped” for business, too.⁸⁰ The North itself insisted that the Society establish an Auckland branch, and criticised the level of Society activities.⁸¹

Development of Diplomatic Relations: 1990s-2001

Diplomatic relations gradually developed with increased interaction. During 1992 Foreign Affairs Minister Don McKinnon and DPRK Foreign Minister Kim Yong Nam (Kim Yōngnam) met in Indonesia. Christopher Butler (Ambassador in Seoul 1990 to 1993) had no direct contact with North Korea. However, he visited the Demilitarised Zone and interacted both with *UN Command Military Armistice Commission* representatives and with the neutral nations’ missions from Sweden and Switzerland that did have contact. The North also experimented with steps towards greater openness, and diplomatic representation in Seoul expanded rapidly, enabling contact with missions holding alternative perspectives.⁸²

Recalling his posting, Butler recounted that:

Unsurprisingly, the North-South divide was an embedded issue within South Korean society. Many families still had relatives in the North and, importantly in a cultural context, the burial sites of family ancestors. In the South, there were cohesive pockets of former North Koreans who still regarded themselves as essentially displaced. Wider attitudes towards the North tended to be polarised between those who essentially regarded North Koreans as brothers and sisters and those who maintained a hard-line view of the North as an untrustworthy and dangerous neighbour.

The latter view was underscored by monthly air raid drills and, although becoming more relaxed as North-South dialogue developed, a general rule to keep extra cash on hand and fuel in their cars in case there was a need to move quickly. First aid equipment, hard hats and gas masks were standard office equipment and a military presence evident as part of daily life. This low level undercurrent of risk awareness could make New Year firework celebrations particularly exciting.⁸³

78 Borrie to Ri Kang Chol, 3 April 1998.

79 Borrie to Ri Kang Chol, 16 December 1998.

80 ‘NZ/North Korea Relations’, 4 September 1997, 58/519/1.

81 Choe Jong Hun to Borrie, 8 January 1998; and Ri Kang Chol to Borrie, 16 December 1998.

82 Interview with Christopher Butler, 16 January 2013.

83 *Ibid.*

Wellington sought dialogue with all UN member states during New Zealand's term on the Security Council (1993-1994). Dialogue with Pyongyang was undertaken in Beijing by Chris Elder (Ambassador to China 1993-1998), the DPRK Ambassador visiting two or three times for meetings. These exchanges were unproductive. While Elder sought to discuss issues facing the Council, the Ambassador wanted to "place on the record all the wrongs committed against the DPRK from the end of [World War II]. Whenever I interrupted to suggest we cut to the chase, he would courteously hear me out then return to the exact point he had previously reached in the historical record."⁸⁴ Indeed, during 1994 officials in Beijing were "treated to a long and, as far as we could tell, standard lecture by the DPRK Ambassador" expounding "in ritual terms" the North's "paranoid view" of US interest in the Peninsula. Wellington was asked to adopt at least a neutral stance in the Security Council on Korea. The North Koreans expressed "pleasure" over the "opening of a book of bilateral dialogue in Beijing (and implicit threat of scope for many volumes ahead)". They were told the meeting had no implications for New Zealand's policy.⁸⁵ Later that year Wellington expressed its condolences over President Kim Il Sung's death and hoped Pyongyang would "maintain the process of dialogue and openness."⁸⁶

Relations were further complicated by North Korean nuclear developments and tensions on the peninsula. In 1994 the DPRK was told that the situation was "very grave," and the possibility of war through miscalculation was feared.⁸⁷ Embassy staff in Seoul felt "somewhat exposed and concerned" over the safety of New Zealanders. Peter Kennedy (Ambassador 1993 to 1995) referred to North Korea as an "active volcano, occasionally puffing smoke."⁸⁸ An invasion by the North was deemed possible and evacuation plans for Embassy staff were "dusted off," these essentially relying on United States logistics. The Embassy provided advice and comfort to New Zealanders in South Korea, but was disappointed with the absence of support from Wellington.⁸⁹

New Zealand gave food aid to the North, but its most substantial involvement was through its support of the *Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO)*.⁹⁰ Indeed, this was labelled "tremendously significant" by the US. Wellington felt KEDO would provide an important framework agreement for Asian regional security and help demonstrate New Zealand's credentials as a "responsible member of

84 Correspondence with Elder, 1 March 2013.

85 'Security Council – DPRK NPT: Beijing contact', 29 March 1994, SIN 216/1/1 part 1.

86 'North Korea: Death of Kim Il Sung', 13 July 1994, SIN 216/1/1 part 1.

87 'Security Council: North Korea', 14 June 1994, SIN 216/1/1 part 1; and 'Security Council: DPRK: US views', 8 June 1994, SIN 216/1/1 part 1.

88 Peter Kennedy to Don McKinnon, 8 December 1995, 1/1/2.

89 Interview with Peter Kennedy and correspondence, 22 November and 26 November 2012.

90 'NZ/North Korea Relations', 4 September 1997, 58/519/1.

the Asian community.”⁹¹ Since such support came at a time when assisting the North was under question, it was something of a “leap of faith.”⁹² The first diplomatic visit in August 1997 was related to KEDO, a “tightly quarantined” visit to the ground-breaking ceremony; the following month the Ministry discussed possible contact at Track Two level. Seoul was “generally supportive” of countries helping the North become more “outward looking,” and dialogue through non-government channels would provide access to DPRK officials “who might be able to facilitate further contacts if required (e.g. to monitor food distribution or pursue bilateral trade objectives).”⁹³

A visiting DPRK delegation in October 1997 hoped that good relations were “just around the corner.” It was interested in New Zealand’s wool sector, and could offer steel products and cement. The delegation came across as “somewhat less gauche or heavy-handed than we had expected,” but the “obsession” with the US was deemed “somewhat schizophrenic.” The appeal for relations was “moderately pitched” within the context of shared Asia-Pacific linkages and New Zealand being an independent small state.⁹⁴ The following year a Centre for Strategic Studies delegation visited the North. Pyongyang’s desire for diplomatic relations was “expressed at times with predictable indelicacy.” It was thought this was motivated by the need to match the South’s successful diplomacy and a desire for additional economic assistance. The DPRK was termed a “failed state, albeit a potentially dangerous one, whose inward looking policies and self-delusions make it a rough stone in the region’s shoe.”⁹⁵ Despite this, and the “very scripted” nature of responses, it was felt dialogue was better than not talking, “a somewhat novel concept at the time.”⁹⁶

In February 1999 Wellington decided to undertake informal dialogue at ambassadorial level via Jakarta as part of international efforts encouraging Pyongyang to take a “more realistic and constructive approach to foreign policy.”⁹⁷ The ROK was advised and informed that dialogue would allow Wellington to convey its views on peninsular issues, nuclear and missile proliferation and Asia-Pacific security. With Seoul’s support, dialogue occurred through the Embassy in Jakarta.⁹⁸ The first meeting with the DPRK Ambassador focused on regional and especially peninsular issues. The North expressed interest in relations and said much could be learnt from New Zealand,

91 Washington to Wellington, 2 March 1995, SIN 216/1/1 part 1; and Wellington to Washington, 20 December 1994, SIN 216/1/1 part 1.

92 Interview with Ministry official, 4 September 2013.

93 ‘NZ/North Korea Relations’, 4 September 1997, 58/519/1; and Bellamy, ‘New Zealand and North Korea’, *NZIR*, July/August 2010, 35 (4), pp.4-5.

94 ‘North Korea: Bilateral relations’, 31 October 1997, NZ/DPRK/1, Vol.1.

95 ‘CSS: NZ visit to North Korea’, 3 July 1998, NZ/DPRK/1, Vol.1.

96 Interview with Ministry official, 4 September 2013.

97 ‘New Zealand contacts with North Korea’, 23 February 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

98 ‘Relations with the DPRK’, 9 March 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

particularly in agriculture. New Zealand was cautious with the Embassy following a “slowly, slowly script” to defuse expectations of early or dramatic progress. The meeting was described as “an amicable but studied process on both sides,” reminiscent of early relations with China. There was “nothing that was truly revealing or frank” from the North.⁹⁹ Meetings continued with the North making a “strong pitch” to establish diplomatic relations, their comments suggesting it viewed this as part of efforts to normalise relations with Asia-Pacific countries. New Zealand responded that it wanted to see reduced peninsular tensions before taking further steps.¹⁰⁰

Under the fifth Labour Government moves to strengthen relations proceeded. In March 2000 the DPRK Ambassador “got straight down to business,” expressing that it was the “right time and high time” for relations. This approach seemed to be based on positive steps with other bilateral partners, and the assessment Labour would be more forthcoming in relations. Indeed Labour MPs were invited to visit the North, and a “history of maintaining cordial relations” with Labour was mentioned.¹⁰¹ Wellington sought to make sure that Pyongyang did not have unrealistic expectations regarding diplomatic relations, wishing to ensure it understood that better relations were conditional on the DPRK maintaining constructive international dialogue, concerns regarding security, arms control and human rights would be raised, significantly increased aid was unlikely, and resident representation was not needed.¹⁰²

With the decline of tensions on the peninsula, the Foreign Ministers met in Bangkok during July 2000 and agreement that officials meet to consider the process for establishing diplomatic relations. New Zealand noted that it would seek open dialogue on weapons of mass destruction and human rights.¹⁰³ That September a Ministry delegation visited the DPRK, and reported Pyongyang primarily viewed New Zealand as a “potential source of economic assistance.” Though Pyongyang’s understanding of the country and capitalism was limited, it also viewed New Zealand as a neutral and non-threatening country from which it could learn, especially in agriculture. Indeed, New Zealand had reportedly been very popular among Pyongyang’s élite in the mid-1980s due to its opposition to US nuclear visits.¹⁰⁴ Seoul supported contact, believing this could encourage Pyongyang’s engagement with the international community. Wellington equally wanted to demonstrate it supported and worked with friends.¹⁰⁵ Allies such as Australia were moving to improve relations with the DPRK,

99 ‘Meeting with DPRK Ambassador’, 1 April 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

100 ‘Meeting with DPRK Ambassador to Jakarta’, 21 July 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

101 ‘Meeting with DPRK Ambassador’, 3 March 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

102 ‘New Zealand relations with North Korea’, 22 June 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

103 ‘Bilateral with North Korea’, 31 July 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

104 ‘EAB Report: North Korea: Pyongyang’s approach to the world’, 15 September 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.2.

105 Interview with Tony Browne, 31 January 2013.

and there was some concern significant trade opportunities for exports including timber and food could be missed.¹⁰⁶

Tony Browne, Director of the Ministry's North Asia Division, led the September 2000 negotiations with the North's Director-General of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Asia Pacific Affairs, Ma Chol Su (Ma Ch'ölsu). These negotiations had been scheduled for two hours by the North but lasted over seven hours, covering North-South Korean relations, disarmament and arms control, missiles, progress with KEDO, human rights, regional political and security issues, trade and wider bilateral links. According to Browne, "The main point we were making was that if we were to have a formal relationship we wanted that to be one that gave us the opportunity to discuss all issues. We were not there simply so that the DPRK could put another country into its trophy cabinet." A comment regarding expenditure on missile development despite widespread poverty angered the DPRK representative, and there was "some confrontation": North Korea felt that New Zealand was acting on behalf of the United States. Browne was told human rights could be discussed providing there was no focus on the North, whereupon he delivered a statement not explicitly referring to the North but clearly directed at the regime.¹⁰⁷

A key issue was Wellington's desire for cross-accreditation via Seoul rather than Beijing. Browne noted New Zealand's small size and, with the few Korean experts it had being based in Seoul, preferred accreditation from there. The North Koreans were "surprisingly receptive and said that it was New Zealand's decision, causing our mouths to drop open." However, on his departure Browne was told this "might be a bit difficult," to which he responded that it "may create a problem." After arriving back in Wellington Browne advised the Government to wait for Pyongyang's response. He recommended that diplomatic relations be established and briefed Prime Minister Helen Clark. After a few months (during which North and South Koreans attended an Auckland conference on peninsular peace and prosperity), the request was granted.¹⁰⁸

This visit was New Zealand's first formal encounter with North Koreans in Pyongyang. The North had expected the delegation would limit itself to the modalities of establishing formal relations, whereas New Zealand sought to "register and elaborate on key policy areas that we see as being central elements of a diplomatic relationship." Discussion on disarmament and arms control was lengthy, and "at times somewhat confrontational." The DPRK lead official accused New Zealand of "putting forward issues at the behest of other countries..., failing to give due dignity to his country, treating him as a defendant in a courtroom, and testing the limits of his tolerance." Pyongyang suggested that the Dairy Board establish a joint venture, a venture New Zealand found questionable since it would need to provide the capital, expertise and product along with marketing skills, while some of the Board's profit would be paid in

106 Korea/NZ Business Council, 19 May 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/3, Vol.1.

107 Interview with Tony Browne, 31 January 2013 and 12 February 2013 correspondence.

108 *Ibid.*

barter goods.¹⁰⁹ Other interaction at this time included three North Koreans undertaking a Lincoln University course.¹¹⁰

Officials concluded that if relations were established dialogue would “not be easy” as responses had been “largely formulaic” with “little willingness to engage in genuine dialogue.” Pyongyang’s view of the world was “not one with which we have been familiar – with its acute and defiant suspicion of any efforts to make progress in disarmament and arms control, and its reliance on ‘sovereignty and dignity’ as the justification for any and all behaviour.” Moreover, the North Korean lead official “by his own oblique admission” was “constrained in what he could say by the fact that all was being recorded to check that spokesmen stuck to the official line.”¹¹¹ However, change was occurring with improved ROK-DPRK relations. Although there was “a long way to go before there is any clear understanding in Pyongyang of what New Zealand stands for, where its key diplomatic interests lie, and how we present ourselves internationally,” a start had been made with the “useful” visit.¹¹² For its part, Pyongyang believed the talks had allowed “a frank and open exchange of views”, and provided “a very helpful opportunity for the two sides to understand each other better.”¹¹³

According to Roy Ferguson (Ambassador in Seoul 1999 to 2002):

It took an awfully long time to negotiate with the North Koreans something they wanted, and we thought we were doing the North a favor. It was quite a difficult negotiation. New Zealand wanted to ensure that any issues were able to be discussed, including nuclear weapons and human rights. It was a fairly tough process but the DPRK did agree to cross-accreditation from Seoul rather than Beijing, one of the first countries to achieve this. This was extremely helpful as our Korean experts were in Seoul.

Moves to develop diplomatic relations with North Korea occurred through the prism of New Zealand playing a constructive role promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Relations with South Korea were strong, and the South was following its ‘sunshine’ policy of engagement with the North. Seoul encouraged its friends, especially its small Western friends, to increase their relations with the North. This would increase the incentives for the North to join the international community and try to ‘knit them in’ with the community, hence having more to win/lose. It would also encourage them to have relations with countries in addition to China.¹¹⁴

109 ‘Visit to DPRK by NZ officials delegation’, DPRK/NZ/2/3, 26 September 2000.

110 ‘Re North Koreans’, 19 October 2000 and 15 November 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.2.

111 ‘Visit to DPRK by NZ officials delegation’, DPRK/NZ/2/3, 26 September 2000.

112 *Ibid.*

113 ‘Meeting with MFA: Round 1’, DPRK/NZ/2/1, 20 September 2000.

114 Interview with Roy Ferguson, 21 December 2012 and correspondence 16 January 2013.

Apart from challenges posed by interacting with the North, there was concern over the release of confidential information about New Zealand's diplomacy to the media and elsewhere by the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT). In July 1999, New Zealand relayed its disappointment that MOFAT had "broken with convention in commenting publicly about matters conveyed to them in confidence regarding the position of another government."¹¹⁵ Although MOFAT responded by asking its officials to ensure this was not repeated,¹¹⁶ by early 2000 Wellington decided there was "good reason to be circumspect in dealing with MOFAT."¹¹⁷

Diplomatic Relations Established: 2001

New Zealand ultimately announced the establishment of diplomatic relations in March 2001. It believed "normalising relations with Pyongyang would enable New Zealand to engage North Korea on issues of key concern for the region such as security and humanitarian relief."¹¹⁸ A delegation involving MP Graham Kelly visited in June; the North indicating it was prepared to send students and interested in school computers. The first accreditation visit by Ferguson occurred that November, and left feeling the relationship was "treated seriously."¹¹⁹ Pyongyang sought political, economic, cultural, scientific and technological ties. It wished to have more exchanges, and hoped that people could be sent to New Zealand for training. However, Ferguson considered the North Koreans had "few specific ideas" on how to archive this "wide-ranging relationship." The North clearly wanted economic benefits, but appeared to have little notion how international trade worked and seemed possessed of a "cargo-cult mentality.... They want trade but not to be part of the international trading system. They want aid but not too much transparency."¹²⁰

Roy Ferguson described the presentation ceremony thus:

Credentials were presented at the National Assembly building via a very simple ceremony with the President [President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly Kim Yong-Nam] and a military officer. Somewhat ironically the DPRK permitted spouses, as well as staff, to accompany Ambassadors during the credentials ceremony, whereas in the ROK at that time Ambassadors were only accompanied by their diplomatic staff. It was very interesting being in Pyongyang, and very dark at night with little lighting.

115 'Visit by DPRK Ambassador in Jakarta: media comment', 28 July 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

116 'Visit by DPRK Ambassador to Jakarta: media comment', 5 August 1999, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

117 'NZ/DPRK Relations', 3 March 2000, DPRK/NZ/2/1, Vol.1.

118 Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Historic diplomatic link with North Korea', 26 March 2001.

119 Kelly, 'Impressions on a visit to North Korea', 1 August 2001; Bellamy, 2010, p.5; Bellamy, 2011, p.17; and Ferguson interview and correspondence.

120 'DPRK Credentials Visit', 20 November 2001, DPRK/NZ/2.

A very formal meeting then took place, with a long preoration by the President followed by an opportunity to respond to all the points he had raised. In the course of the visit and dialogue with various officials it was noted that North Korea needed to fulfill its NPT [nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] obligations, to both the international community and to New Zealand. There was real concern that the North was not living up to these. The North was quite reluctant initially to talk about human rights but New Zealand quietly persisted and the North eventually agreed. This established a precedent that New Zealand was not going to visit to just listen, but would raise issues, including uncomfortable ones. Many officials asked about bilateral assistance, such as in agriculture and medical equipment. Overall the visit was considered a success, and illustrated the power of diplomacy.¹²¹

The delegation believed the North Koreans wanted the visit to be successful, with the tone of all meetings courteous and friendly. It was convinced that engagement would be “more profitable than isolation of this pathetic yet dangerous regime.... Overall we would like to think that our views registered with them even if their responses were predictable,” but patience was needed. “This was only a small step forward on what will undoubtedly be a long and frustrating journey.”¹²²

With diplomatic relations established, various visits have ensued. Paul Sinclair, who headed the Ministry of Defence’s International Relations Branch from 2000 to 2012, recalls the few DPRK officials he met at ASEAN Regional Forum meetings were “very pleasant - a marked contrast to when they spoke at the table on Peninsula issues. At times it seemed their heated outbursts were something of an act.”¹²³ The Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Pyongyang in 2007, at which point areas of potential co-operation were covered.¹²⁴ More recently, a June 2012 senior DPRK delegation advocated stronger relations. At another visit in November, North Korea sought “a new chapter” in relations not “bound by the past.”¹²⁵ The group said that New Zealanders needed a greater understanding of the North, and to acknowledge it wanted friendly relations and posed no threat.¹²⁶ The North Koreans and Society judged the visit went well.¹²⁷

However, New Zealand remains sensibly cautious and, with many other countries, opposes DPRK nuclear and missile tests. This opposition has been expressed clearly

121 Ferguson interview and correspondence.

122 ‘DPRK Credentials Visit’, 20 November 2001, DPRK/NZ/2.

123 Interview with Paul Sinclair, 26 July 2013.

124 ‘North Korea coming out of its shell, says Peters’, *NZH*, 19 November 2007, p.8.

125 Hwang Sung Chol via Borrie, 14 November 2012. This is the Secretary General of the Korea-New Zealand Friendship Society’s personal opinion.

126 Interview with senior Korea-New Zealand Friendship Society member, 29 November 2012. This is the member’s personal view.

127 Interview with Borrie, 15 December 2012.

and is in line with Wellington's goal of relations encouraging forthright dialogue. New Zealand supports measures that are broadly shared by the international community: peace on the Peninsula; denuclearisation; the North-South process; dialogue and cooperation; and the North's economic and humanitarian recovery. Efforts to achieve these have not been "particularly successful as the North has rather wilfully taken its own path." If there was a stable and positive political environment it would be easier to consider providing additional assistance, perhaps in agriculture and forestry.¹²⁸ South Korea has supported Wellington's position.¹²⁹ The ROK has referred to Seoul and Wellington as moving in the same direction on Pyongyang, a strategy influenced by shared values. It respects New Zealand's admittance of delegations, but is wary of DPRK intentions.

The Way Ahead

Serious challenges and legitimate concerns hinder future relations. North Korea appears likely to retain its nuclear capabilities and to strengthen its military technology. The threat of war is low but cannot be dismissed. This is especially because of recent elevated tensions, the concentration of firepower along the Demilitarised Zone, the DPRK leadership transition and domestic pressure in South Korea for a strong position on the North. Although highly unlikely to win, the DPRK could inflict significant damage on the South, and conflict would risk American and Chinese confrontation. New Zealand has obligations as an international citizen and can legitimately be expected to consider some role if conflict arose. The region's peace is vital to this country's interests and the safety of New Zealand citizens in South Korea must be considered. Apart from the prospect of humanitarian relief, military force might be requested or mandated by the UN to support regional peace and security.

Despite the challenges, constructive dialogue fostering mutual trust, transparency, and cooperation is vital. Wellington's influence and resources are limited, but it has some advantages when interacting with the North. New Zealand's historical and continuing interest in a peaceful and stable Peninsula has been praised, and it is a small Asia-Pacific nuclear-free nation that can provide an intelligent and creative viewpoint. Beyond a view of New Zealand as non-threatening and generally neutral, DPRK diplomats have historically referred to the similarities of both countries, such as their size and location.¹³⁰ Its knowledge, especially in agriculture, has also been sought. New Zealand can facilitate constructive dialogue through a multilateral approach including engagement with both Koreas. Communication, perhaps involving direct or indirect, multilateral or bilateral talks can be encouraged, along with the study of the Korean Peninsula.

128 Interview with Ministry official, 4 September 2013.

129 HE Noh Kwang-II, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, 18 December 2009.

130 'North Korea', 17 June 1974, 236/1/2 part 1; and 'Proposal to end divisions', *EP*, 27 July 1999, p.5.

Although the North's regime has displayed longevity, its possible collapse warrants consideration. A collapse would be challenging for the international community: the threat of a subsequent humanitarian crisis and loss of nuclear weapons and technology are grave concerns. As in the case of war, the potential intervention of major actors adds further complications, along with the threat of crisis escalation. Whatever occurs, the DPRK faces challenges such as impoverishment that may spark unrest, especially as awareness of better conditions elsewhere grows. Major humanitarian issues require attention and, given the problems facing North Korea's economy, assistance will continue to be requested. However, instability could cause a humanitarian crisis requiring much greater resources. This underlines the importance of working effectively with the international community, and with non-government organisations.

A unified, peaceful, democratic and strong Korea will have a major impact on international relations, and the ability to make an important and positive world contribution. As regional peace, prosperity and stability are vital, strong relations with this Korea will be critical. However, reunification under democracy appears unlikely in the near future, and will be challenging. A desperate regime clinging to power is unlikely to help improve bilateral relations.

Conclusion

New Zealand's Cold War position was primarily shaped by the view that Pyongyang's foreign policy was aggressive and unsophisticated (and needed to change for stronger relations), the prioritising of relations with Seoul, and the stance of friends and allies. Furthermore, efforts by Pyongyang and its supporters in New Zealand to promote their position faced obstacles. Despite this, moves to build ties provided the foundations for diplomatic relations. The Society played, and continues to play, a significant role here. The shift in Wellington's position towards increased unofficial contact and diplomacy occurred against the background of the Cold War's demise along with easing tensions on the peninsula, particularly from the late 1990s. This change was encouraged by increased engagement with Pyongyang by Seoul and other countries. Wellington felt that relations allowing forthright dialogue on all issues would assist it to convey its viewpoint, a greater understanding would be encouraged, and opportunities for closer relations might arise. Ultimately this follows New Zealand's desire to be an active and constructive member of the Asia-Pacific community.

Although New Zealand's position on DPRK visits is now more relaxed, there are challenges to strengthening relations reminiscent of the earlier decades. ROK relations, along with shared valid concerns over Pyongyang's foreign policy, and the North's very poor human rights record are influential. The current relationship is further constrained by Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme and its bellicose behaviour. Moreover, Kim Jong Un (Kim Chōngŭn) currently appears unlikely to make fundamental foreign policy changes to address these challenges. While caution remains prudent, promoting constructive dialogue can help address Peninsula tensions.

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Paul Bellamy has visited Korea most recently as a distinguished guest of the Korea Foundation and with the ROK Embassy has composed a history of New Zealand-ROK diplomatic relations. He has published widely on New Zealand-North Korean relations with a longer analysis appearing in the forthcoming Korea book edited by Kenneth Wells, and will present a paper on New Zealand's attempts to help reduce Korean Peninsula tensions at an Asia-Pacific post-conflict peace-building workshop. His third book (a co-authored study of post-World War II civil wars) will be published shortly by Congressional Quarterly Press.