(From President Rhee to President Eisenhower)

KYUNG MU DAI

June 17, 1953

Dear Mr. President:

First of all, I must apologize for my long delay in answering your good letter of June 6, 1953. To confess the truth, I made more than one draft, but I could not express myself clearly without appearing to be argumentative, which I wanted to avoid. I do hope you will read this letter in the same friendly spirit in which it is written.

From the beginning, we repeatedly tried to make clear to all friendly nations that, if an armistice permitting the Chinese aggressors to remain in Korea should be concluded, we could not survive. This apprehension has not abated.

Evidently, our friendly nations seem to take it for granted that the withdrawal of the Chinese communists from Korea and the subsequent unification of Korea can be accomplished by the political conference scheduled to follow the armistice. I do not wish to enter detailed argument over this point, but I feel I must say, at least, that we do not believe in the possibility.

It is true that it is a matter of opinion. Our opinion is, however, supported by facts which we can never ignore or forget. The experiences we have gone through ourselves will remain a guiding factor in forming our judgments until something happens which convincingly counteracts them.

Now that the United Nations is to conclude a ceasefire agreement with the communist aggressors, regardless of what may happen to Korea, in practical terms, we are constantly haunted by the question of how we can survive as a nation at all. The following passages will, I hope, give you some idea of our reactions to the situation.

We desire to remain friendly to the United States to the last, remembering what it has done for us, both militarily and economically, in our struggle against world communist aggression.

If the United States forces have to stand by, for some reason, ceasing to participate in any further struggle, or to withdraw from Korea altogether as an aftermath of the impending armistice, we have nothing to say against it.

Whenever they find it necessary or desirable to leave Korea, they can do so with a friendly feeling towards us just as we are trying to remain their friends. So long as either party does not interfere with the plans of the other, both can maintain the cordial relations between them.

In the first year of this three-year-old-war, both the United States and the United Nations alternately and repeatedly anounced, as their war objectives, the establishment of a united, independent and democratic Korea and the punishment of the aggressors. It was at the time of the United Nations drive to the Yalu that they made these announcements so that we naturally took them as their declared war objectives. But later when the communist forces proved to be stronger than expected, the United Nations statesmen took to the interpretation that it had never been intended to unify Korea by war. That was an open confession

of weakness; very few people took it at its face value. Nowadays, we hear no more about the unification of Korea or the punishment of the communist aggressors, as if either we had adhieved these objectives or abandoned them. All we hear about is an armistice. There is a grave doubt that an armistice reached in such an atmosphere of appeasement can lead to a permanent peace acceptable and honorable to us. Personally I do not believe that the communists will agree, at a conference table, to what they have never been made to agree to on the battle field.

Your generous offer of economic aid and increase of the ROK defense forces are highly appreciated by all Korean people, for they are what we badly need. But when such offers come as a price for our acceptance of the armistice as we know it, they cannot have but little inducement, because, as I have said before, to accept such an armistice is to accept a death warrant. Nothing would be of much avail to Korea, to say the least, after that fatal blow should have been dealt it.

We do not question the sincerity with which you kindly promise to use your authority to bring about a mutual defense pact between our two nations after the conclusion of the armistice. As a matter of fact, a mutual defense pact is what we have constantly sought, and we are behind it heart and soul; but, if it is tied up with the armistice, its efficacy would be diminished almost to a vanishing point.

Mr. President, you will easily imagine what a hard situation we confront. We committed everything, including our armed forces, to the United Nations action in Korea, incurring frightful losses in manpower as well as material destruction, in the sole belief that we and our friends had the selfsame objectives of unifying sundered Korea and punishing the communist aggressors. Now the United Nations seems to stop short of its original aims, and to come to terms with the aggressors which we cannot accept, not because we have never been consulted but because those terms would mean sure death for the Korean nation. Moreover the United Nations is now putting pressure on us in cooperating with it; and is joining hands, it seems, with the enemy in this matter of armistice terms.

We cannot avoid seeing the cold fact that the counsels of appeasers have prevailed in altering the armistice position of the United States. In our view, this perilous trend, if perpetuated by the conclusion of this fatal armistice, will eventually endanger the remainder of the free world including the United States which, millions of both free and enslaved hope and pray from the bottom of their hearts, will lead them in the liberation of the peoples in chains behind the iron curtain.

At this very moment, the communist forces are launching a large scale offensive, when the armistice talks have scarcely left anything except the affixing of signatures by the parties concerned. This should be a warning for our immediate future. The terms of the armistice being what they are, the communist build-up will go on unhampered until it is capable of overwhelming south Korea with one swoop at a moment of the communists' own choosing. What is to follow for the rest of the Far East? And the rest of Asia? And the rest of the free world?

Still looking to your wise leadership for a remedy in this perilous hour,

Yours very sincerely,

/s/ Syngman Rhee

The President
United States of America

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