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—ROK-US Relations in a Changing World—

Address by Roh Tae Woo
President of the Republic of Korea
Before a Joint Meeting
of the United States Congress
(Washington, D.C., October 18, 1989)

Mr. Speaker,

Mr. President,

Distinguished Senators and Representatives,

I would like to express my gratitude to you for giving me this rare privilege to speak before a joint meeting of the United States Congress—the August representative body of one of the world's oldest and most powerful democracies. As the democratically elected leader of one of the world's newest democracies, I feel honored and proud standing here today.

I am honored, not only because it is in these halls that democracy has flourished, but also because the work of this great institution has brought freedom to many people of the world and has nurtured the best in human achievement.

I stand here proudly because I have a story to tell, the story of a people who, while enduring great hardship, have cultivated a free and vigorous democracy within a single generation.

Syngman Rhee, the first President of the Republic of Korea, came to this rostrum in 1954 in order to express the heartfelt
gratitude of his countrymen for the courage and sacrifice that the people of the United States had rendered in protecting and preserving freedom and democracy in Korea.

At that time, the sounds of gunfire still echoed in the memories of President Rhee's countrymen, a legacy of the terrible Korean War. Thirty-five years have passed since then and much has changed.

From the depths of despair during the war, a spring a hope land confidence welled up in Korea. What was once a trickle soon grew into a rising tide of political and economic strength that continues to carry my people forward. And so, instead of long lines of hopeless children or hungry refugees, what the world saw at the 1988 Olympic Games was a prospering, confident people striding proudly towards the future.

Much has changed, indeed, Mr. Speaker. But the lofty ideals which bind Korea and the United States have endured, tested through sweat and, at times, blood. When Korea's very survival was in danger the United States rushed to defend the security and liberty of our people.

While my country strove endlessly to build a thriving democratic nation from the poverty and ruin of war, the United States stood beside us, shoulder to shoulder. For that, the Korean people's gratitude has never wavered.

For my part, I feel a particularly deep affinity for the United States. When my country was in flames, I volunteered, still wearing a student uniform, to fight for our liberty. At that time many American soldiers fought alongside me and my colleagues. Many gave their lives so that Korea might be free. Later I fought in Vietnam together with young American soldiers. I know there are many of my fellow soldiers among the members of the House and Senate who are present here today.

I thank those legislators and thousands of other brave Americans who fought for our freedom. Our people will long remember your sacrifice.

If you ask a Korean what America means to his country, his answer will be simple and clear: we are allies. And if you ask your