

North Korea open to talks with United States, South Korea says

South Korea's presidential office said today that North Korea's delegation to the Olympics agreed that there should be talks between the United States and North Korea.

Lim Eui-kyeom, a spokesperson for the Blue House, the presidential office, said that just like South Korea, the delegation from Pyongyang believed that U.S.-North Korean relations should improve.

The announcement followed talks today between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and members of North Korea's delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics closing ceremony.

In response, the White House did not rule out direct talks, saying: "We will see if Pyongyang's message today, that it is willing to hold talks, represents the first steps along the path to denuclearization. In the meantime, the United States and the world must continue to make clear that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are a dead end."

It said that any dialogue with the North must result in denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and that a "maximum pressure campaign must continue until North Korea denuclearizes."



Michael Probst/AP Photo

Kim Yong Chol, vice chairman of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party Central Committee, back right, watches the closing ceremony with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, left, Moon's wife Kim Jung-sook, and Ivanka Trump, Feb. 25, 2018

A State Department spokesperson told ABC News the United States was "in close contact with the Republic of Korea about our unified response to North Korea," using the official name for South Korea. "As President Moon stated, 'The improvement of relations between North and South Korea cannot advance separately from resolving North Korea's nuclear program.'"

The South said the talks lasted an hour and concluded just a couple hours before the Olympics closing ceremony started in Pyeongchang, South Korea. The North Korean delegation included Kim Yong Chol, the vice chairman of the North Korean ruling party's central committee, and Ri Son Kwon, the chairman of North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, according to the Blue House.

Moon was joined by the Blue House national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, and the director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, Suh Hoon, the president's office said.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said he hoped relations between North Korea and South Korea would improve, and the North Korean delegation said that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un felt the same way, according to the spokesperson.

The Blue House made the announcement as the closing ceremony was getting underway. The American and North Korean delegations sat seats away from each other during the ceremony but did not appear to interact.

ABC News asked the U.S. delegation for comment and did not immediately hear back.

ABC News' Clark Bentson contributed to this report from Pyeongchang, South Korea, and ABC News' Conor Finnegan and Meridith McGraw contributed reporting from Washington.

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