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Koizumi, Chirac agree on U.N. reform, apart on China

By Natsumi Mizumoto

TOKYO, March 28, Kyodo - (EDS: ADDING DETAILS)

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and French President Jacques Chirac agreed Sunday to continue working to reform the U.N. Security Council and get North Korea to return to six-country talks on its nuclear arms program.

But Chirac and Koizumi remained at odds over European Union moves to lift a 1989 arms embargo on China and agreed only to continue talks on the issue of which of the two countries -- Japan or France -- should host the world's first nuclear fusion reactor.

In a joint news conference after their meeting in Tokyo, Chirac said France has long supported a proposal for Japan and Germany to become permanent Security Council members "in a manner in which the two countries would have all rights and obligations of permanent members, particularly a veto."

According to a declaration issued after the meeting, France and Japan agreed that the Security Council should be expanded in terms of both permanent and nonpermanent memberships, and that they will continue trying to realize the expansion along with other U.N. reforms at a U.N. global summit planned for September.

During the news conference, Koizumi said he told Chirac Japan is opposed to arms exports to China, referring to Beijing's estimated annual double-digit percentage growth in military spending over the past decade against Japan's cuts in its huge defense outlays over the past three years.

Chirac said he explained that the planned lifting of the ban during the first half of this year will not change the situation as exports of sensitive weapons are under strict control in Europe.

"We think steps that would not cause tensions to the security situation in East Asia overall continue to be needed," Koizumi said, adding Tokyo's wish that the Taiwan issue be resolved peacefully and diplomatically.

According to the declaration, Japan said "significant uncertainties" continue to exist in the East Asian security situation, and France and Japan confirmed the significance of strengthening their strategic talks on the region.

As for the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, Koizumi and Chirac said during the news conference they agreed Japan and the European Union will continue to discuss the matter. But Koizumi said Tokyo has no plans to retract its bid to host the project.

Chirac, calling for an early resolution of the issue, proposed sending a European commissioner to Japan next month to accelerate talks and Koizumi agreed, a Japanese official said.

On North Korea, Chirac supported Koizumi's policy of seeking to resolve the nuclear issue at the six-party talks and also backed Tokyo's efforts to resolve the issue of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens, according to the document.

The two leaders also discussed the Middle East, with Chirac calling for Syria to completely withdraw its troops and spies from Lebanon, the official said.

The declaration, entitled "New France-Japan Partnership," says it is intended to provide new

impetus to the bilateral relations that have developed under a 20-point action program signed in 1996.

The document calls for Japan and France to develop and strengthen high-level strategic dialogue, make efforts for further bilateral cooperation on business and environmental issues, and work hard to fight poverty and help Africa.

Chirac, who last visited Japan in July 2000 for the Group of Eight summit in Okinawa, arrived Saturday in Osaka Prefecture and toured the site of the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi Prefecture earlier Sunday.

Chirac is slated to give an address at a Tokyo forum and he and his wife, Bernadette, are scheduled to meet with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko before leaving for home Monday night.

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