

**10th Annual Meeting
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APF Member Reports - Republic of Korea

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Honorable Chairman Suren Tserendorj, distinguished members of APF, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is my honor to speak before the 10th Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

I assumed my position to lead the National Human Rights Commission of Korea in April of this year. Building upon the groundwork that has been laid over our Commission's first 4 years, I hope to further develop the Commission.

When I took office, our Commission was already in the process of expanding its roles and its staff to handle gender discrimination cases and gender-related issues, which had been previously handled by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. In addition, the Commission has recently established two local offices.

To guide our work in the upcoming years, the Commission has set up three priority areas: 1) strengthening social rights, 2) expanding human rights education, and 3) cooperation with domestic and international human rights bodies.

As Korea has developed economically, the gap between the haves and the have nots has continued to widen leaving inequality in social rights. To strengthen the social rights especially for the underprivileged, the Commission is currently assessing whether the rights to child care and to housing for low-income households are adequately protected. We hope our assessment leads to valuable changes.

Secondly, while it is important to investigate and remedy human rights violations, we need to build a societal system where human rights abuses are prevented to begin with. To this end, we have focused on human rights education for not only law enforcement officials but also for students and teachers across the country. In this vain, in cooperation with the National Police Agency we conducted a human rights training course for those engaged in training police officers. Another training session was offered to more than 130 school teachers. Furthermore, we visited to investigate the condition of detention facilities and protective facilities in order to prevent any future human rights violation.

Thirdly, we have increased cooperation with other human rights groups. The added expertise gained from the cooperation will better equip us in accomplishing our various projects.

In the first half of this year, our commission has made some important decisions on pending human rights issues. We made recommendations to abolish capital punishment, to strengthen three basic labor rights of irregular workers, and to loosen restrictions on hair length in schools. As a result of those recommendations, we

witnessed vigorous debate on human rights throughout society. As an abuse case in the military outraged the Korean society, we conducted an ad hoc field investigation at the barracks. To prevent similar human rights violations and to create a culture of respect for human rights in the army, more officers and soldiers now receive human rights education.

We also intend to recommend the National Action Plan, which we have worked hard to prepare, to the government within this year. We plan to finalize our position on the rights of conscientious objectors to the military conscription. This has been a hot issue in South Korea, a country technically at war with the North.

The most significant mission of the Commission, as an independent focal point for the human rights in Korea, is to assume the leading role in making Korea a more human rights sensitive country. In particular, we should prevent human rights violations by the government bodies in order to fully promote people's rights. To accomplish this mission, I'm firmly convinced that the cooperation among the national institutions in the Asia Pacific region will be of tremendous help. I very much look forward to the discussions and work ahead of us.

Thank you.