



Tuesday, 24 March 2009

Yu Myung-hwan
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade
37 Sejongno (Doryeom-dong)
Jongno-gu, Seoul 110-787
Republic of Korea

Dear Minister

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairperson of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, (the APF), the regional network of 17 national human rights institutions in the Asia Pacific region.

Recognising the National Human Rights Commission of Korea's (NHRCK) important and long-standing contribution to human rights in the Republic of Korea and the region, it is with great concern that my colleagues and I recently heard about the proposal to change the structure and reduce significantly the staffing levels of the NHRCK.

The NHRCK is a national human rights institution that is recognised internationally for the important role it has played in the protection and promotion of human rights at the domestic, regional and international level. While I recognise that governments need to consider the efficient administration of agencies of the State, particularly in these difficult economic times, my colleagues and I feel it necessary to express our concern that the proposed reductions target the important work of a National Human Rights Institution and that the level of reductions proposed are significantly larger than those for other government agencies.

The APF notes that the Paris Principles, adopted by the United Nations in 1993, set out the international standards applicable to the establishment and functioning of national human rights institutions (NHRIs). Importantly, the Principles require that NHRIs have a mandate to operate independently of their governments, and that they are resourced to a level appropriate for them to effectively undertake their responsibilities in protecting and promoting human rights. Implicit in these requirements is the capacity for NHRIs to determine priorities and establish an appropriate organisational structure based on their independent assessment of domestic human rights issues. The proposed changes to staffing levels and to the structure of the NHRCK may be seen to impact directly on these Principles.

I note that United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has already expressed her concern regarding the proposed changes to the NHRCK, and that similar concerns have been expressed by national and regional human rights organisations and other stakeholders. That the proposed changes have received such attention at the domestic, regional and international level indicates the level of importance all stakeholders place on the role of NHRIs in the promotion and protection of human rights. The proposed changes therefore may impact adversely on the current reputation of the Republic of Korea as one of the regional leaders in the promotion of human rights.

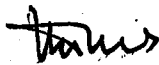
I would therefore like to request that you reconsider the proposed changes to the NHRCK and to ensure that any changes that do occur are consistent with the requirements of the Paris Principles. Furthermore, and to the extent that efficiencies are being pursued across the public sector, I would urge you to ensure that such changes are commensurate with reductions to other public sector

agencies. To do otherwise may be considered indicative of an attempt to interfere with the independent operation of an NHRI, in contravention of the requirements of long-standing and universally accepted international standards.

The APF would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you should you so request.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Tan Sri ~~Abu Talib~~ Othman
APF Chairperson

cc: Dalgon Lee, Minister of Public Administration and Security
Professor Ahn, Kyong-Whan, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission of Korea