

Gender Equality on the Korean Peninsula:

“Only With the Meaningful Participation of Women Can the Road to Reunification be Lasting and Comprehensive”



Delegates of South and North Korean Women held the Forum, “Asia’s Peace and the Role of Women” at Panmunjom in 1992. Source: The Kyunghyang Shinmun

Issues of gender equality and women’s participation can often be neglected in peace building processes and thus far it has certainly not been a driving agenda in the current negotiations on the Korean Peninsula. To seek to fill this policy gap ISDP invited three experts from North and South Korea to share their views on gender equality in their respective countries, the achievements and challenges, as well as prospects for future cooperation.

Introduction

Recently ISDP sought to initiate and facilitate discussion on the issue of gender equality on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea has, over the years, achieved great progress in terms of women’s development and gender equality, with the adoption and implementation of various laws and policies, establishment of a functioning “gender machinery,”¹ and changes in cultural norms. However, a series of recent phenomena epitomized by the #MeToo movement shows that there is still a long way to go. Among other issues, the 2017 OECD report *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle* reports that South Korea has not only the highest gender pay gap of any OECD country, but also that women are significantly underrepresented both in politics and in leadership positions in private companies.² Declaring himself to

be a “feminist president,” President Moon Jae-in has pledged to undertake reform measures to combat discrimination and inequalities.³

While in North Korea the government emphasizes that full gender equality is guaranteed through the constitution and different laws, there appear to exist significant perceptual gaps on gender norms with other countries. Furthermore, while acknowledging that efforts are needed to increase women’s representation in senior posts in government, other issues such as gender-based violence and lack of access to adequate healthcare are either strenuously denied or attributed to the impact of sanctions.⁴ Nevertheless, the precise status and provisions relating to women’s rights and gender equality in North Korea remain comparatively less understood, prompting this publication to seek to partially fill this gap.

As the peace process progresses on the Korean Peninsula with cooperation in numerous domains, opportunities need to be seized to engage in discussions and exchanges between the two Koreas on gender-related issues. Recognizing the need for a better understanding of positions and perspectives, ISDP invited three gender experts from North and South Korea to Stockholm to learn about Sweden's policy and strategies to promote gender equality, as well as to exchange views on the status of gender equality in their own countries. Despite obvious divergences and limitations, ISDP believes that mutual information exchange and discussion of perspectives is a necessary first step from which to base further joint activities and cooperation.

Accordingly, the first contribution comes from Eun Ha Chang, a director at the Korean Women's Development Institute in South Korea. In her article, she assesses past efforts, and challenges faced, to elevate discussion and cooperation on gender issues between the two Koreas and its future potentials. Arguing that there is a lack of women's agenda and voices in the current peace process, she identifies some topics and formats where common ground could be found, namely in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and UN Resolution 1325. As she asserts, "only with the meaningful participation of women can the road to reunification be lasting and comprehensive."

The next contribution by O Son Hwa, a senior researcher at the Korea-Europe Association in the DPRK, outlines the origins and development of North Korea's gender policy to the present day. In so doing, she argues that the protection and promotion of women's status and role has consistently been a cornerstone of state policies and laws. The final article by Hwang Su Yon, a researcher at the same association, builds on this background by providing specific details in regard to the comprehensive benefits and rights accorded to women in different areas, including employment, culture, health, education, and politics.

We hope that you find the paper an informative read. Reflecting sensitivities, articles have been lightly edited for language but not content.

ISDP would like to thank International IDEA and the Korea Foundation for their support and assistance.

References

1. Gender machinery refers to the institutions, processes, and networks coordinating the implementation of gender equality across all levels of policy.
2. OECD, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, <https://www.oecd.org/korea/Gender2017-KOR-en.pdf>, 2017, OECD report.
3. Alice Privey, *#MeToo: South Korea's Social Revolution*, <http://isdpeu.com/metoo-south-koreas-social-revolution/>, 2018, Institute for Security and Development Policy.
4. For discussion of gender-related issues in the DPRK, see for example relevant reports by UNICEF, CEDAW, SIDA, UNDP.

Authors

- *Dr. Eun Ha Chang is Director of the Center for International Development and Cooperation at the Department of Promotion and Strategy of Gender Equality Policy at KWDI, Seoul, South Korea. She can be contacted at: ehchang@kwdimail.re.kr*
- *Ms. O Son Hwa is a senior researcher at the Korea-Europe Association in Pyongyang, North Korea.*
- *Ms. Hwang Su Yon is a researcher at the Korea-Europe Association in Pyongyang, North Korea.*

About the Authors' Institutes

- The Korea-Europe Association is under the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) is a government research think-tank under the Prime Minister's Office of South Korea. Since its establishment in 1983, KWDI has led comprehensive research on women and family issues and contributed to promoting women's participation and welfare in South Korea. Over the years, KWDI has also expanded its mandate into the global arena by disseminating its research results and sharing South Korea's policy experiences.

Institute for Security and Development Policy 2018

The **Institute for Security and Development Policy** is an independent, non-partisan research and policy organization based in Stockholm dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs. For over a decade, ISDP has through its **Korea Center** provided a platform for discussion and debate between Northeast Asia experts focused on security and development issues on the Korean Peninsula. As such, it is committed to sharing different perspectives on important issues so as to enable constructive debate.

For enquiries, please contact: info@isdp.eu

No parts of this paper may be reproduced without ISDP's permission.

Disclaimer: The authors to this joint publication take responsibility only for the views expressed in their own articles. These furthermore do not necessarily reflect the opinions of ISDP or its sponsors.

Searching for Common Ground: *History and Prospects of Inter-Korean Women Exchanges*

Eun Ha Chang, Ph. D.
Korean Women's Development Institute

Introduction

High-level diplomacy is taking place on the Korean Peninsula with three Inter-Korean Summits so far in 2018. Official talks in many sectors are proceeding, not only in security and military realms but also in transportation, sports, and cultural areas. With President Moon and Chairman Kim's third Inter-Korean Summit held in September this year, exchanges seem to be building momentum.

Despite the euphoria in breaking the long stalemate, it is difficult to find women on these scenes. Not only are they less represented in numbers, but their voices are barely heard. The Panmunjom Declaration stipulates that both Koreas agree to encourage more active cooperation, exchanges, visits and contacts at all levels in order to rejuvenate the sense of national reconcili-

ation and unity. However, women-specific exchanges are still yet to begin. Indeed, the lack of a women's agenda and voices in inter-Korean relations has been a perennial issue raised by the women's peace movement in South Korea.

“Researchers have found that women's involvement in peace processes increases the sustainability of peace agreements.”

Researchers have found that women's involvement in peace processes increases the sustainability of peace agreements,¹ not to mention inclusiveness of the agenda. In this sense, only with the meaningful participation of women can the road to Korean reunification be lasting and comprehensive. With this in mind, the author reviews past exchanges between North and South Korean women, identifies achievements and challenges, and suggests a possible agenda for future collaboration. More specifically, the author argues that both Koreas can start from less political and internationally-oriented topics for mutual learning and confidence building before moving onto more bilateral and inter-Korean ones.

History of Women Exchanges

The first official encounters between women from both Koreas occurred in the early 1990s. During this period, mainly initiated by South Korean civil society, tripartite talks took place between women from South Korea, North Korea, and Japan. Forums were held four times under the title of “Asia's Peace and the Role of Women,” in Tokyo (1991), Seoul (1991), Pyongyang (1992), and in Tokyo again (1993). To attend the Seoul and Pyongyang Forums, delegations from both parties respectively crossed Panmunjom in a symbolic gesture. The fifth Forum was scheduled to be held in 1993, but came to a halt due to a deadlock in inter-Korean relations at that time.

Additionally, starting from 1993, inter-Korean discussions restarted on the issue of sexual slavery under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). First held in Pyongyang in 1993, with the fourth and final forum

taking place in 2002, the three parties met under this agenda, which was mainly led by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, a trailblazer organization established in coalition with over 30 women NGOs in South Korea to resolve Japanese sexual slavery issues.

Inter-Korean women's exchanges blossomed with the signing of the June 15 South-North Joint Declaration in 2000.² Starting from 2001, civilian exchanges expanded rapidly, and the June 15 and August 15 South-North Joint Events³ (*minjok kongdong haengsa*) were held in Pyongyang and Seoul, respectively. Under the umbrella of these events, a women's committee was separately formed and women representatives from both Koreas participated. For example, during the August 15 South-North Joint Event in 2001, a discussion session was held on how women from both Koreas could contribute to the implementation of the June 15 Joint Declaration. In the process of jointly organizing these events, women from both Koreas also had an opportunity to increase mutual understanding. Furthermore, being placed under an official government mechanism for exchange, these meetings became more systematic in form and procedure compared to the 1990s.

Inter-Korean women exchanges culminated when the first "South-North Women Unification Conference" (*Nambuk yŏsŏng t'ongil taehoe*) was held in 2002 at Mount Kumgang in North Korea. This constituted the biggest stand-alone women-specific event since the division of the Peninsula. Around seven hundred women from both Koreas participated representing the fields of labor, arts, religion, and politics. Programs included a forum to discuss implementation and building solidarity among women of both Koreas to achieve the June 15 Joint Declaration, an arts exhibition, recreational activities, a dinner reception, joint art performances, and even singing and dancing.

Humanitarian matters were another area of concern.⁴ Women's organizations in South Korea sent powdered milk to the Chosun Democratic Women's Union (*Chosŏn minju yŏsŏng dongmaeng*) and Chosun Women's Association (*Chosŏn yŏsŏng hyŏp'oe*) in 1997, when North Korea was undergoing an acute famine. Additionally, in 1999, women's religious organizations in

South Korea also sent powdered milk, sea weed, fabric, corns, and thermal clothing to North Korea. Several years later in 2004, women's groups in South Korea launched an awareness campaign and sent emergency relief to North Korea after the humanitarian crisis caused by a train explosion at Ryongchon Train Station.

Despite the continuous exchanges over these years, they came to an abrupt stop in 2005 when the political situation worsened, and the August 15 South-North Joint Event, under which women's events were being planned, was suspended. And while exchanges resumed and continued until 2008, these were intermittent and heavily influenced by the wider political and security context.

Assessing Past Exchanges

Several experts have pointed out the achievements of past exchanges between the women of both Koreas.⁵ First, women started to participate in the reunification process by exchanging information and views on unification and many other issues.⁶ In fact, that women should actively participate and be a major engine for the reunification process was what both Koreas have unquestionably agreed upon since the early 1990s when the exchanges first began.⁷

Second, through various contacts, dialogues, and joint-organization, mutual understanding between North and South Korean women increased. But while both parties came to stress their commonalities as one nation, differences also became pronounced. While the South wanted to focus more specifically on issues pertinent to gender and peace,⁸ topics of interest for the North revolved around a grander discourse of reunification, the nation, and peace. In addition, dialogues sometimes encountered difficulties due to diverging perspectives on gender roles, marriage, and attitudes towards leaders. Nonetheless, inter-Korean exchanges were recognized as a valuable opportunity to exchange viewpoints and better understand each other's positions.⁹

Despite such achievements, women's exchanges between the two Koreas have also revealed many challenges. First, exchanges were heavily influenced by the political and security situation. Even after 2001, when

exchanges expanded, they proceeded in a stop-start manner, as has been the case in many areas of inter-Korean relations.

Third, agendas for meetings were limited to certain areas.¹⁰ While the two sides agreed on the principle that women should play a major role in the reunification process, there were only few areas which both Koreas could agree upon as agendas for discussion, namely the role of women in the unification process, “comfort women” issues under Japanese colonial rule, and humanitarian matters.

“Women’s participation is more than necessary in inter-Korean peace talks if reunification is to happen in a sustainable and inclusive manner for all people of both Koreas.”

Fourth, South Korean civil society has been the main implementer of exchanges. As mentioned, during the 1990s, initiatives were undertaken by civil society organizations from South Korea. Even after 2001, when inter-Korean women’s contacts were carried out in full force under the framework of South North Joint Events, it was civilians from South Korea who played a major role. In North Korea, however, it was quasi-governmental organizations, including the Chosun Democratic Women’s Union and the Chosun Women’s Association, which carried out these efforts. As a result, the mismatch in the nature of the corresponding entities from both sides created difficulties in setting a common agenda. In addition, these events were not open to the public, and, as a result, participants were limited only to women who were involved in these events, namely the organization committee, performers, and audiences.¹¹

Prospects for Future Cooperation

Women’s participation is more than necessary in inter-Korean peace talks if reunification is to happen in a sustainable and inclusive manner for all people of both

Koreas. In order to solicit women’s participation, it is necessary that women in both Koreas identify common issues faced by women and devise a common strategy that can be reflected in the peace process towards unification. Having been severed for more than 70 years, however, it is important for both sides first get to know each other, deepen mutual understanding, and reestablish trust. Resuming dialogue and creating learning opportunities can be a starting point.

Considering the limitations from the past, inter-Korean women exchanges can potentially be approached from a slightly different angle this time. While continuing to cooperate on the issues that have hitherto been identified as agreeable to both parties, I would argue that this time, the two Koreas can also touch upon a more internationally-oriented agenda that requires domestic implementation, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its National Action Plan (NAP).

Accordingly, the SDGs and UNSCR 1325 NAP are two areas that can be considered as a starting point for resuming discussion between the two Koreas. In the case of South Korea, domestic implementation of both agendas has recently begun while North Korea has yet to start. Both parties can first enhance mutual understanding of each agenda through various discussions and forums, and identify ways to implement them domestically. These are also areas where a third party such as the UN or international NGOs can assist as mediators or platform providers.

SDGs

The SDGs constitute an internationally agreed development agenda that was adopted in 2015, with an aim to achieve its goals by 2030.¹² Inheriting the basic approach of, and yet widely expanding, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SDGs are made up of 17 areas combining development as well as environmental goals. Goal 5, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment,” is a stand-alone gender goal, specifically dedicated for women and gender issues. Gender goals are also mainstreamed in ten other goals as part of a cross-cutting agenda. Gender goals in the SDGs are different from those in the MDGs as they tackle more fundamental and structural problems such as

gender-based violence and the lack of a rights-based approach.

North Korea actually approved of applying SDGs into their development plan in September 2015, when the UN Resident Coordinator of DPRK presented the SDGs to relevant ministries in the DPRK Government.¹³ In addition, the UN and the DPRK Government have jointly developed a UN Strategic Framework for 2017-2021, which is heavily aligned with SDGs. The following is an excerpt from the Framework on how to incorporate gender equality in its implementation:

Gender Equality: In accordance with SDG 5, the Government and the UN are both committed to ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in terms of selecting and targeting program beneficiaries. They are also committed in the context of Strategic Priority #4 to undertaking an overall review of the situation of gender equality in the country, with a view to sharpening existing policies in this regard. Every project designed, and activity supported, by the UN in DPR Korea will be assessed through a gender lens and should be designed with the objective of enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. An Inter-Agency UN Gender Focal Points Task Force will be set up and tasked to monitor and ensure implementation of gender equality.¹⁴

While North Korea has agreed on mainstreaming gender in receiving external aid, they have yet to begin implementing SDGs in their national policy. Developing a domestic implementation plan for the SDGs in North Korea can be an agenda to tap into. Seoul has recently begun establishing the Korea Sustainable Development Goals (K-SDGs), the process of which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2018. South Korea can therefore share its experience of establishing a domestic mechanism for implementing SDGs with North Korea. Since North Korea has a strong legal and policy foundation on gender equality (see other contributions in this paper), analyzing how North Korean laws and policies on gender equality are relevant with SDG goals can be a starting point. In addition, since SDGs are heavily result-oriented goals with specific indicators, measures for implementation can be jointly discussed, reflecting both systems' characteristics.

“Facilitation and mediation by a third-party can potentially better ensure the sustainability and continuity of the talks.”

UNSCR 1325

UNSCR 1325 is the first resolution ever to be adopted at the UN Security Council in 2000 on the harrowing impact of conflict on women and girls.¹⁵ The Resolution is comprised of four major themes: prevention of women from conflict-related exploitation and violence; participation of women in peace processes; protection of women from violence in conflict; and relief and recovery for those affected. UNSCR 1325 was also a trailblazer resolution for other related resolutions that followed at the Security Council, namely, UNSCR 1820(2008), 1888(2009), 1889(2009), 1960(2010), 2106(2013), 2122(2013) and 2242(2015), which address similar issues. Despite its significance, domestic implementation of UNSCR 1325 by UN member countries has been weak, and, as a result, resolutions that followed have emphasized the need for the establishment of National Action Plans (NAP). As of October 2018, 76 UN Member States (39 percent of all UN member states) have established NAPs.¹⁶

South Korea launched its first NAP in 2014 and has revised it to establish its second NAP in 2018. Both NAPs center on the aforementioned four themes, and include South Korean women's increased participation in international peacekeeping missions, preventing and supporting women victims in conflict, and providing relief and assistance. More importantly and relevant to this article, South Korea's first and second NAPs both call for mainstreaming gender perspectives in unification policy and the participation of women in the inter-Korean peace process. The two NAPs also include support to the “comfort women” victims. Considering that issues such as unification and comfort women are previously agreed topics for exchange by both Koreas, and that these topics can be dealt with within the framework of the NAP, North Korea can consider establishing its own NAP. In the process, South Korea can share its experience of drawing up its NAPs. In addition, as women, peace, and security

and NAPs are an international agenda largely receiving support from UN member countries, multilateral support and discussion would also help both Koreas come up with a common vision in the process.

Third Party Involvement

Whatever the topics of inter-Korean women discussions may be, I would strongly argue for third-party involvement in order for future exchanges and discussions to be insulated to the extent possible from the vagaries of political and security dynamics between the two Koreas. Analyzing the past patterns of exchanges suggests that those which materialized were those more international and multilateral in nature, which either involved Japan or the UN.¹⁷ Direct exchanges can still take place under governmental auspices, as was the case in 2001 and just recently in October 2018 with South-North Joint Events newly resuming. However, as governmental support can often be hampered by political and security constraints, until a more secure peace regime is guaranteed, facilitation and mediation by a third-party can potentially better ensure the sustainability and continuity of the talks.

“Both parties could begin from a simple information exchange, introducing each other’s systems, sharing policies and challenges.”

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for the more active participation by women from both Koreas in the peace process on the Korean Peninsula. In order for them to work together towards this goal, mutual learning and trust building will be central. This can begin from a discussion on a mutually agreed topic, which is less political but beneficial to both parties. The SDGs and UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan are suggested as a starting point for such discussion. Both parties could begin from a simple information exchange, introducing each other’s systems, sharing policies and challenges, and possibly drawing out a common strategy on issues that are equally relevant to both parties.

Furthermore, this can be more sustainably carried out if a third party is involved. With the expansion of bilateral exchanges achieving momentum at the moment, I suggest that multilateral discussions also be pursued. Lastly, both Koreas can consider jointly hosting a symbolic event of an international nature in 2020 on the theme of women and peace, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action,¹⁸ the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325, and also the fifth anniversary of the adoption of SDGs.¹⁹ In sum, finding common ground on a gender agenda between the two Koreas will not be easy, but not impossible if sensitively and judiciously approached from the starting points identified.

References

1. Stone, Laurel. “Quantitative Analysis of Women’s Participation in Peace Processes,” in *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes*, Annex II by M. O’Reilly, A. Ó Súilleabháin, and T. Paffenholz, (2015). P. 34. <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/IPI-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>
2. This is the joint declaration signed by President Kim Dae-jung of Republic of Korea and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-il of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on June 15, 2000.
3. These were comprised of cultural performances, banquets, discussion sessions on unification, and meetings among different sectors such as labor, students, education, journalists, farmers, and so on.
4. Suk-im, Kim, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification (Nambukyösönggyoryuwa p’yöngwat’ongil,” *P’yöngghwarül mandünün yösönghoe*), *Women Making Peace(WMP)* (2005), p. 26
5. Kim, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification” Kyung-ran Chung, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification(Nambukyösönggyoryuwa p’yöngghwat’ongil),” *Women Unification School, Women Making Peace(WMP, P’yöngghwarül mandünün yösönghoe)* (2006)
6. Kyung-ran Chung, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification,” p.12.)
7. Cowalknews, *Women’s Role and Peace in Asia*, <http://www.cowalknews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=1452>, 1991.

8. Chung, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification,” p.14.
9. Kim, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification,” p. 13.
10. Kim, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification,” p. 11.
11. Kim, “South-North Korean Women Exchange and Peaceful Unification,” p. 12.
12. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>, The Sustainable Development Agenda.
13. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals launched in DPRK, <http://kp.one.un.org/content/unct/dprk/en/home/news/SDG-launch-2015.html>
14. United Nations and Government of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, “Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the United Nations and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: 2017-2021,” (2016). P.14.
15. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>, 2000.
16. National Action Plans for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.
17. Women from South and North Korea both attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.
18. Action plan adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing 1995.
19. Jung-soo KIM, Conference Proceedings of “Peace and Prosperity of the Korean Peninsula, Women’s Power” held on June 18, 2018 hosted by Korean Women’s Development Institute. p. 10. The proceedings can be downloaded at <http://www.kwdi.re.kr/seminarView.kw?sgrp=S01&siteCmsCd=CM0001&topCmsCd=CM0002&cmsCd=CM0023&pnum=3&cnum=0&ntNo=590&src=&srcTemp=&currPg=1>

Gender Equality Policy of the DPRK

Ms. O Son Hwa
Korea-Europe Association

Today the history of mankind continues to advance towards the building of a civilized and sound society which provides people with full rights to independence. Women comprise one of the two driving forces of society pushing ahead with this advance. From its earliest days, the DPRK government has understood the significance of ensuring women’s rights and has expended great efforts to protect and promote women’s status and role, in so doing taking every measure possible to abolish any kind of discrimination against women. As outlined below, the DPRK has a 70-year tradition of achievements in ensuring gender equality. This article focuses primarily on the legal framework providing a basis for gender equality.

Historical Background

Looking back into Korean history, there was a long period dominated by a medieval feudal system followed by a more than 36-year-long period of Japanese colonial rule under which Korean women became victims of the feudal Confucianism of male superiority and colonial slavery, and, therefore, they could not dare to dream of social activities. Personal restraints on women were so cruel that they were deprived totally of their freedom of marriage, were never free to go outdoors, and, even worse, were sold like goods. In the early twentieth century in particular, the status of Korean women was really miserable and tragic under Japanese colonial rule.

After the liberation from Japanese colonial rule in August 1945, one of the primary tasks for the building of a new country and democratic development of society was to free women from social subordination and discrimination and to put an end to the outdated system of gender relations based on inequality. The great leader President **Kim Il Sung** founded on November 18, 1945, the Korea Democratic Women’s Union – a mass socio-political organization of women and the first such social organization to be established after the liberation.¹ A year later, on July 30, 1946, the “Law on Gender Equality” was promulgated to guarantee women’s rights in society by law and in practice.

The promulgation of the Law, the first of its kind in the world, was indeed a historical event that liberated women from medieval feudal family relations and socio-political and economic inequalities, and provided legal guarantees so that they could flourish and lead independent and creative lives as true masters of society; it was a great national event that brought about a revolutionary turn in the status and roles of women in the country. It opened a broad road to Korean women, who had up until then been suffering from social subordination, inequality, discrimination, and insult, to take part in socio-political life and exercise equal rights with men.

Since the promulgation of the Law, the DPRK government has improved and enriched the contents and guarantees of the Law through different stages of social changes and development processes. Today the DPRK's people enjoy a high level of gender equality and the expression "female discrimination" sounds like a foreign word to them. The policies and laws of the state with regards to the gender issue reflect not only the existence of gender equality in legal terms, but it also goes further than this in encompassing a moral obligation to treat women with greater respect and courtesy to the extent that it has become a social and cultural norm.

Policies and Measures of the DPRK Government to Ensure the Rights of Women

To oppose all forms of discrimination against women and realize complete and genuine gender equality is an unwavering policy of the DPRK as well as the responsibility and duty shouldered by every institution, enterprise and organization. The DPRK government attaches great importance to the position and role of women in social progress and the well-being of families and has consistently maintained the policy of respecting and valuing women. All policies, laws and sector-specific action programs of the DPRK accord women equal rights with men on the principle of zero tolerance of any form of discrimination and any affront to their dignity.

The "Law on Gender Equality" was the first measure to be taken ever in Korean history to legalize the termination of discrimination against women. The Law stipulated that women have equal rights and freedom

with men in regard to political life, education, culture, health care, employment, marriage, family and all other aspects of social life. The gender equality and non-discrimination principle and other specific details stipulated in the Law were intensively and comprehensively reflected in the 1948 Democratic Constitution, and further enriched and developed through other various laws and regulations.

"The DPRK accord women equal rights with men on the principle of zero tolerance of any form of discrimination and any affront to their dignity."

The DPRK Socialist Constitution is key to guaranteeing the improvement of women's status. The Socialist Constitution provides that citizens shall enjoy equal rights in all spheres of State and public activities; that all citizens who have reached the age of 17 shall have the right to vote and be elected irrespective of sex, race, occupation, length of residence, property status, education, party affiliation, political views and religion; and that women shall be accorded equal social status and rights with men. The Family Law provides that the husband and wife shall have equal rights within the family. The stipulation of gender equality and provision of the fundamental rights of women finds not only recourse in the Constitution and its strong power of enforcement, but is also thoroughly carried out in detail through relevant laws and regulations as well as decisions and instructions of relevant institutions. The Socialist Constitution was amended on April 9, 2009, stipulating that the State shall respect and protect human rights, which manifested the DPRK's commitment to ensuring human rights at a higher level. Accordingly, a lot of efforts have been made for the strengthening of the legal system for the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, leading to the adoption of a series of laws in that regard.

The details regarding the improvement of women's

status, education, capacity-building, employment, among others, are specified in relevant laws and regulations. As such, laws and regulations pertaining to the improvement of women's political, social and family status have been adopted, amended and renewed constantly. The many relevant laws include the Nationality Law, Election Law, Local Authority Law, Civil Law, Civil Proceedings Act and Family Law, Labor Law, Law on Labor Protection, the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women, the Social Security Law, the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children, the Law on the Protection of the Elderly, the Public Health Law, and the Law on the Nursing and Upbringing of Children. Combined all these laws guarantee gender equality and women's rights in the DPRK.

To take an example of such, the Socialist Constitution stipulates that the State shall afford special protection to mothers and children and provide all necessary conditions for women to play a full role in society. The Family Law provides that the State shall consistently maintain the policy of affording special protection to mothers and children and for providing conditions for mothers to bring up and educate their children decently. The Socialist Labor Law and the Law on Labor Protection, meanwhile, contain provisions regarding the special protection of working women.

The DPRK further clarified its commitment to fully ensuring gender equality and non-tolerance of discrimination against women in whatever form by adopting on December 22, 2010, the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women, which stipulates that the DPRK maintains the consistent policy of ensuring full equality of women with men and that the State shall prohibit all forms of discrimination against women. This Law comprehensively reflects the principles and matters in respect of the protection of women's rights that are already provided for in the Socialist Constitution, the Law on Gender Equality 1946, and other laws on education, health care, employment and family, plus other matters arising in further promoting their rights. It provides that the protection of women's rights is a matter for society as a whole and ensures that they fully exercise their rights.

As set forth in the adoption of this Law, the legal basis

for the exercising by women of their rights has been further consolidated, with the protection and promotion of their rights being the legal obligation of all institutions, enterprises, organizations, officials and individuals. As a result, the social climate of respecting and prioritizing women has been further fostered. The Law was amended on June 30, 2015, to provide women better working and health care conditions such as extending the period of maternity leave from 150 days to 240 days, ensuring sufficient breastfeeding for children and mandating full rest for the recovery of new mothers.

“Today all women in the DPRK take part in political and public life on an equal footing with men.”

The employment policy of the DPRK ensures that women have equal rights with men in regard to work, labor protection and social security. The Labour Law provides that the State shall provide all necessary conditions for women to take part in public activities. The local power organs and the State institutions, enterprises and social cooperative organizations are required to provide nurseries, kindergartens, children's wards and public service facilities for the convenience of working women, as well as organize home industry work-teams and home cooperatives so that women who do not go out to work may join them if they so wish. Gender equality in terms of remuneration is a long established practice in the DPRK. The Labor Law stipulates that all working people shall receive equal remuneration for equal work irrespective of their gender, age and nationality. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women provides that institutions, enterprises and organizations shall pay women equal remuneration with men for work of equal value.

The great Leader **Kim Jong Il**, paying deep and constant attention to promoting women's political status and role, enhanced women's dignity and honor to the full and ensured that a climate of respecting women prevails throughout the whole society. Today all women in the DPRK take part in political and public life

on an equal footing with men. There are no legal or institutional impediments to the exercising by women of their socio-political rights and their advancement. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women provides that women have equal rights with men to vote and to stand for election, and that the State shall encourage women to take an active part in political and public life and raise the proportion of women deputies to people's assemblies at all levels from the county People's Assembly to the Supreme People's Assembly, on the principle of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. Women deputies represent women in the area concerned in the sessions of people's assemblies, where they make, on their behalf, suggestions or provide inputs into decision-making, and inform them of the decisions, laws or regulations adopted at the sessions. Women's participation in government is also guaranteed by law and in practice. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women stipulates that all women have rights to hold public office, and public institutions shall employ as many women as possible and ensure them good working and living conditions. In particular the Cabinet decision adopted in December 2009 required that the prescribed quota of women in ministries and national institutions should be fully ensured.

“There are no legal or institutional impediments to the exercising by women of their socio-political rights and their advancement.”

The DPRK government pays deep attention to conducting good cooperation internationally with regards to gender issues through governmental bodies like the National Coordination Committee and, more recently, the Korea-Europe Association, as well as social organizations such as the Korea Socialist Women's Union which is actively engaged in the work of the International Democratic Women's Federation and other international and regional organizations. The government, as a member state, is participating actively in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and sends many women officials to attend international and regional confer-

ences.

Today, the tradition of love and trust of the great leaders who had given prominence to women as masters of the state has been fully carried on by the Supreme Leader **Kim Jong Un**. He has clarified guidelines for the further development of the women's movement to meet the requirements of the new century and has been taking all possible measures. Korean women absolutely trust and love their beloved social system that enforces the benevolent policy of respecting and prioritizing them, and play their due role in the struggle for the development of the country.

The DPRK will make further efforts to enhance the status and role of women so as to realize the complete and full gender equality in every aspect of life, with special emphasis on raising the rate of women's participation in politics, governmental and social organizations and institutes, both nationally and internationally.

Editor's Note

1. According to DPRK writing conventions, leader names are rendered in bold.



*Participants at the Third Forum “Asia’s Peace and the Role of Women” held in Pyongyang
Source: The Kyunghyang Shinmun*

The Benefits Granted by the State and the Real State of Women's Rights in the DPRK

Ms. Hwang Su Yon
Korea-Europe Association

Thanks to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s policy of respecting women that has legislated gender equality, today Korean women enjoy complete equality with men in politics, the economy, labor, cultural life and all other sectors of social life, holding a position and playing their role as one of the pillars of the state and society. This article provides a summary of rights and benefits accorded to women.

Labor Rights

The government has paid special attention to accord- ing labor protection to working women and provides every possible condition for the greater participation of women in public activities.

It is against the Law and Regulations, specified below, to make women do work that is too arduous, harm- ful or dangerous for their physiological characteristics, and for pregnant women as well as those breastfeeding to work night shifts, overtime and on holidays.

The retirement age for women is 55, yet women who are willing and capable can keep working over this age. Institutions and enterprises are required to set up nurseries, kindergartens, children's wards and welfare facilities, so that women can work without the least inconvenience.

In line with the Labour Law and the Law on the Pro- tection and Promotion of the Rights of Women, no discrimination is allowed in the payment of rewards and all women receive remuneration according to the quantity and quality of the work done. Women enjoy not only the equal remuneration for equal work with men, but also additional payments in accordance with the law.

Working women more than six months pregnant are given light jobs and receive the same amount as their basic salary while on leave, and those with more than three children (under 13) work six hours a day and receive wages equivalent to eight hours of work.

The state grants working women maternity leave in addition to annual and supplementary leave, and in 2015, it extended the period of maternity leave from 150 days to 240 days, namely 60 days before and 180 days after childbirth, and during those days it gives maternity allowance equivalent to a full salary.

“As of 2017, the number of women with ‘PhDs’ totals to around 500.”

As for delivery, nursing and upbringing of children, the state grants universal free medical care, free education and other benefits. All types of medical services includ- ing antenatal, delivery and postnatal care are provided free of charge under the complete and universal medi- cal care system. Pregnant and lactating women receive special health-care services, and mothers and children are provided with education and medical care so as to avoid too many pregnancies and deliveries.

Women with three or more children, triplets or quad- ruplets are provided with a special allowance and get food, clothes and stationeries at less than half price, compensated by the state, until children are old enough to work. Until they attain a weight of 4kg, triplets (or more) stay in a maternity hospital, and af- terwards, are moved to nurseries under the care of doc- tors and nurses. Families with three or more children are provided with apartments on a preferential basis.

The state has introduced a mother-heroine-system where it gives prominence to mothers of several chil- dren by granting them the title of Labour Hero and provides special care for them. Moreover, all the ex- penses required for nursing and children's upbringing are paid by the State, thus easing women's burden of rearing children, and so ensuring their full participa- tion in public activities.

Education

Women in the DPRK have equal rights with men to receive education at all levels and choose their major according to their wishes. The Socialist Constitution provides that citizens have the right to education and this right is ensured by an advanced educational sys-

tem and by the educational measures enacted by the State for the benefit of the people. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women provides that women shall be ensured equal rights with men in the field of education, culture and health care and that the educational guidance institution and the local people's committees shall give women equal access with men to schools at all levels and right to employment after graduation; and, furthermore, that no woman shall be denied admission to a university or college nor subject on account of being female, save for specially designated courses.

The universal 11-year compulsory education system which had been in force in the DPRK since 1972 was replaced by the 12-year system in 2014, making pre-school, primary and secondary education available and accessible to all children at the state's expense, and complete equality is ensured.

Surveys conducted in 2008 and 2012 showed that there were a total of 3,743,513 students at primary and secondary schools, with girls accounting for 48.9 percent thereof. Enrollment at primary schools was 1,394,397, of whom 683,526 or 49.0 percent were girls, while enrolment at secondary schools was 2,349,116, of whom 1,147,089 or 48.8 percent were girls.

Women, on equal terms with men, receive college, university and postgraduate education according to their wishes and abilities, and receive "PhDs," engineering and "expert" certificates, among other qualifications. As of 2017, the number of women with "PhDs" totals to around 500.

Women without formal higher education qualifications have access to a well-organized system of technical and vocational training. They have lectures for two hours a day after work, and are qualified as engineers after a five-year course.

Starting in 2009, a long-distance education system has been established at major universities and sci-tech diffusion bases¹ of the country, with women's access thereto increasing year after year. This system has spared women the trouble of having to stay away from home, enabling them to take courses in their homes,

or nearest available libraries or sci-tech diffusion bases for qualifications in the fields of their interest. For instance, as of 2015, about 10,000 students from 1,700 units (enterprises and institutions) were enrolled at the tele-college of the Kimchaek University of Technology, the highest seat of learning technology in the country, of whom women make up 60 percent.

All rural women enjoy the same benefits of free education and medical service as urban women in accordance with the Law on Education, the Law on Public Health and the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women.

“The DPRK has directed special attention to increasing the proportion of women officials in local people's committees and leaders of institutions, enterprises and organizations.”

Participation in Political Activities and Employment

Women fully exercise their rights to vote and to stand for election in accordance with the Socialist Constitution, the Law on the Election of Deputies to People's Assemblies at All Levels and the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women.

According to a survey by the Central Bureau of Statistics, women accounted for 20.2 percent and 27 percent of the deputies elected for the 13th Supreme People's Assembly in 2014 and local people's assemblies in 2015, respectively.

Women take an active part in making state laws and government policies in our country. For instance, women experts and jurists have been playing an important role in making the Law on the Nursing and Upbringing of Children, the Law on Public Health and the Law on Education.

The proportion of women in government has been in-

creasing. In line with the Cabinet decision adopted in December 2009 that required a prescribed quota of women in ministries and national institutions to be fully ensured, the Education Commission, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foodstuff and Daily Necessaries, Ministry of Finance and the Central Bureau of Statistics, in which women officials already made up more than 20 percent of employees, have seen a 5-6 percent increase.

Given that the State has long maintained a policy on gender equality, the general public has a good understanding thereof and legislative measures have been put in place through such laws as the Socialist Constitution, the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women, the Family Law and the like. What remains to be done is to ensure that they are translated into action and results.

For this reason, the DPRK has directed special attention to increasing the proportion of women officials in local people's committees and leaders of institutions, enterprises and organizations. This has ensured full reflection of women's wishes and demands in the decisions of the people's committees and giving due consideration to their rights and interests in the implementation of the decisions. In 2015, the proportion of women officials in people's committees at all levels was 23.3 percent on average.

Admission of women into universities and cadre-training institutions has increased and a lot of competent women have been appointed to leading posts. In-service trainings and workshops have been organized to help women officials keep abreast of the latest developments in their respective areas and improve their leadership skills and abilities. All women officials have access to national-level seven-day in-service training every year, while some of them have been sent, in consideration of their wishes, ages and abilities, to full-time training institutions to attend six-month or two-year courses.

Accordingly, the proportion of women leaders in institutions, enterprises and organizations has remarkably increased. For instance, the newly organized units in the sectors of education and foodstuffs and daily necessities are mostly headed by women. Organizations

like the Korea Education Fund, the Korea Association for Supporting the Children and the Fund for Children with Disabilities and Orphans are staffed mainly by women.

The educational sector has a lot of women employees, making up 4.9 percent of the working population disaggregated by sectors. According to the Population Census of 2008 women accounted for 99 percent, 86.8 percent and 50.8 percent of kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers respectively, and 24.2 percent of college and university teachers.

Women in the DPRK enjoy, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, their rights to work in all public institutions including the Presidium of the SPA, the Cabinet, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of External Economic Affairs. They also represent their State, government, institution, enterprise or organization in the international arena and participate in the work of international organizations.

“In 2015, the proportion of women officials in people's committees at all levels was 23.3 percent on average.”

The fact that women make up 47.8 percent of the workforce shows that women accounting for half of the population take an active part in public activities without being subjected to any discrimination and with their rights to work according to their wishes and abilities fully guaranteed.

In order to encourage women in their political and public activities, women of many achievements and contributions to the society and people have been given wide publicity through mass media and were granted with the title of Labour Hero, Order of National Flag, Order of Labour, People's and Merited Scientists, People's and Merited Actress, People's and Merited Sportswoman, and other dozens of honorary titles and official commendations.

As of today, the number of heroines designated for

outstanding merits they have performed in industry, agriculture, light industry, broadcasting, sports, arts and other fields totals to 460. Among them are a woman mechanist working for over 30 years as a tractor driver in Kangryong County and a woman lathe operator working for 10 years at Hungnam Fertilizer Complex winning the title of Labor Hero in her 30s. Pak Kum Ok, Song Kum Suk and other mothers with several children have been conferred the honour of mother heroines.

As for the sports field, the fact that a lot of DPRK sportswomen have won gold medals at World Championships, Olympic Games and other international or regional events shows that they are fully enjoying their rights to sports and cultural life. In particular, women footballers won the East Asia Cup Game for three consecutive years to 2017, while many other sportswomen have won championship medals in gymnastics, judo, marathon, table tennis and Taekwondo. These achievements are a considerable source of national pride.

Chairman **Kim Jong Un** of the State Affairs Commission of DPRK designated Mother's Day in 2012, for the first time in the DPRK's history and saw to it that the 4th National Mother's Conference served as the turning point in remarkably enhancing the role and position of women.

Today in the DPRK we celebrate on a nationwide scale July 30, the anniversary of the promulgation of the Law on Gender Equality, March 8, International Women's Day, and November 16, Mother's Day.

All these successes achieved in the women's movement in DPRK are attributable to the policy of valuing and respecting women enforced by the Great Leaders **Kim Il Sung** and **Kim Jong Il**, and Respected Supreme Leader **Kim Jong Un**.

Editor's Note

1. These are educational centers where working people can learn and be updated about new technological and scientific developments.

If you would like to cite this publication, please use the following reference style: "Gender Equality on the Korean Peninsula: 'Only With the Meaningful Participation of Women Can the Road to Reunification be Lasting and Comprehensive'," Focus Asia (Stockholm: ISDP, November 2018).