

**The changed situation and the related actions in Korea
since the San Francisco Conference in 2007
(Country Report)**

1. The launching of the new government, and the Candlelight Rally against the impervious government

On February 25, 2008, the new government launched with Lee, Myung-bak, the 17th elected president of Korea. The political aim of the new president (hereafter MB Government) is to revive the economy, specifically to stimulate economic activity by reducing taxes and encouraging corporations to make more investments so that it will create more jobs. For the result of this large-enterprise-friendly strategy, he is hoping to achieve the 7% of the economic growth, a national per capita income of \$40,000, and the 7th ranked economy¹.

The growth-first policy does not concern about people's needs and welfare, and it has been proved by people's vociferous protests and complaints against the government ever since it came into power.

On May 2008, tens of thousands of people gathered in the City Hall Square with candles in their hands for the same reason.

The Candlelight Rally first got started by raising a question to the safety of imported beef, but soon it escalated into criticism on the government, asking it to resign.

The Rally lasted for more than 100 days, and the issues were expanded to the matter of education, to a counter movement to the Great Canal Project and the privatization policy of the public industry, etc. Ever since the first rally of May 2nd, it was led to the nationwide demonstration.

As the rally was prolonged until June even with more and more participants, people have showed encouraging peaceful manners to each other, restraining possibilities of any violence, despite the physical skirmish caused by the excessive suppression of the police force.

Nevertheless, more than 1,600 people were punished by law because of the rally.

The rally was not only about the imported beef, but more of the resistance of the people against the dictatorial MB Government, crying out for democracy.

2. The rupture of the South-North Korea relationship, and rising of militarism stressing the need of national defense by armaments.

¹ The public pledge of 747 Growth

To add up on this downhill there is another issue and that is the South-North Korea relationship.

MB Government is oblivious of its practical tasks to carry on the former government's policy toward North Korea, including the June 15 South-North Joint Declaration, and the October 4 joint Declaration. On the contrary, they have a negative approach to the established agreements and that gives us no chance for the better situation.

More over, they are showing their lack of adequate understanding on North Korea by keep telling them, 'We will help you to attain the national per capita income of \$3,000 for denuclearization'(hereafter 'denuclearization' open-door 3000'²).

MB Government's economical approach toward national security-related issue led them to fix the policy to strengthen the Korea-America alliance and maintain the national security only by mutual aid of Korea-America-Japan.

Despite all the changes and improvements on South-North relationship and the political condition we have achieved for last 10 years, the present status is retrogressed to 1970s and 80s.

3. Resisting people, oppression of the Government leading them to death

On January 20, 2009, a deadly fire has broke out during a police and goon standoff with protesters on the top of a building in Yongsan who were opposed a redevelopment plan for it, and 5 protesters and 1 of the police commandos died.

On that day, police made a dawn raid in a container box to approach protesters. The suppression and pierced skirmish were started as the container box ascend to the top of the building, and during the dramatic dawn raid petrol-fuelled fire tore through the building

Inhabitants were protesting over the low level of compensation they were being offered for being forced out of their homes, but at first the government sat back and watch, and passed their burden on inhabitant, reconstruction company and the goons employed by

² The public pledge

them. However since it happened in the heart of Seoul, they decided to silence the turbulent protesters as fast as they could, and pressed a forcible suppression, which caused this tragic death.

Since then the government has been rejecting conversation with the bereaved under the pretext of fair execution, and the bereaved are still staying at the place of the deceased without funeral for 6 months by now.

Also, there could have been another tragic incident even before the post-Yongsan trauma recedes. Ssang Yong Motors Corporation under legal management decided large scale lay-offs and caused a strike. Fortunately they made a dramatic agreement between labor and management and stopped another tragic ending, but the government didn't try to mediate at all. Instead, they brought an expeditious response to deal with the situation through commitment.

MB government has been showing no interest on understanding the reason of its goons, but making frantic attempts to seek vindication of their armed suppression by hunting out any illegal action carried out by protesters.

4. The destruction of Democracy (Congressional coup d'etat)

Due to this political line of MB government, Korean democracy has backslid for more than 10 years while the militarism has strengthened. All the efforts of last 10 years to establish democratic Korea-America alliance and national defense have been denied by this government, and the national defense reinforcement became priority. They don't listen to the voice of peace and human rights.

Inhabitants from O-Hyun Lee, Paju, Kyungki Province, are confronted with a crisis to be forfeited their land to the government by an agreement on relocation of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea(hereafter USAFK), just like what happened in Dae-chu Lee, Pyung Tack. They are trying to meet a policy maker from the Ministry of National Defense or the Blue House to keep their hometown, but it seems the government doesn't want to be bothered with such a petty matter. Therefore the inhabitants have no choice but unilaterally accept the request of the military, not the policy maker.

The government never asks for a counterplan to the USAFK for contamination or damages caused by military training. On the contrary they would rather communicate

the standpoint of the USAFK to the inhabitants, saying that it's inevitable. We may well wonder who they are working for.

Also, it is said that it will cost estimated 10-13 trillion won for the relocation, but contrary to former agreement to share expenses, Korean government will meet more than 90% of the cost. When people ask for the reason, they answer that they can't tell us anything because it's still under negotiation, the USAFK does not want to open the information, or it is secrecy due to the security risk.

Against the government forfeiting the lands of people and assuming an indifferent attitude toward the damages and burdens caused by the base relocation in the name of strengthening Korea-America alliance, people are keep appealing the unjust treatment toward them, hoping the triumph of right and the truth over might.

Moreover, there have been continuous violent crimes done by USAFK, which were not able to become issue due to the reasons discussed above.

Main cases:

Sexual molestation in Dong-du Chun(July 5, 2008 / The criminal attempted a drunken woman on the street and tried to take her away. He ran away because there were some people around watching but was caught in his second attempt on another woman few months later.)

Serial sexual molestation in Dong-du Chun and Hong-dae(June and August, 2008 / While police are searching for the molester from Dong-du Chun, in August an American soldier was arrested for double sexual molestation in Hong-dae. Police found the evidence points to him as the molester from Dong-du Chun. He was put on trial only for the Hong-dae case, because the victim from Dong-du Chun didn't want to accuse him, and was sentenced to 3 years in prison.)

Armed burglary in a convenience store in Pyung-taek(August 2, 2008 / An armed burglar broke into a convenience store in Pyung-taek, threatened the cashier, snatched money and ran away. He was arrested and sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison with a three-year stay of execution.

Attempted murder against a Pilipino woman in Pyung-taek(March 6, 2009 / An American soldier stabbed an acquainted Pilipino woman for 18 times in front of a bar on the street because she refused to meet him. He also stabbed two other Korean men who tried to stop him and inflicted a severe injury. He was arrested and sentenced to 7 years in prison. He has appealed to the courts above and the trial is still underway.)

Further, the attitude of MB government going against the times and history by ignoring achieved agreements and policies, is also making our actions against militarism powerless.

In the case of Conscientious Objection (hereafter CO) movement, we already achieved the Alternative Service and the former government have announced with their plans. However, MB government published the result of an outsource research for Military Manpower Administration on December 24, 2008, looking for an excuse to take back their words.

The abstract of the research result is that 'We are far from the national agreement on the issue of the Alternative Service.' for the reason that more people voted for disapproval than approval in the research. It is obviously trying to justify their flimsy pretext. The purpose of the research was to figure out how to run the policy after it is adopted, and the report was 500 pages long analyzing the current situations of other countries with alternative service system, how many alternative service officers are needed in public welfare facilities, etc. Despite all the studies, government is relying on the tip of the iceberg and trying to withdraw the whole Alternative Service plan. If that happens, all the people who have been postponing enrollment or whose trials have been put off will end up being in jail.

However, there was a turning point in CO movement. During last Candlelight Rally, the Solidarity for Peace and Human Rights (hereafter SPR) tried to get across the ideas with protesters on the street. It was about how to protect their own safety and communicate with confronting police without violence, and to help police to realize that they have the right to disobey unjust order.

From this, one of the combat police(conscripted into the military but carries out the duty as police) whose name was 'Lee, Kil-jun', announced his intention of not going back to his base from the vacation, rejecting unjust order. As enormous as the rally was,

his decision caused a great sensation. A lot of people who were offensive against CO movement shifted their ground became amicable.

Even though the government does not give legal sanction to Conscientious Objection and postponed the operation of alternative service, more and more people are consciously objecting to hold a gun.

MB government is also trying to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality(hereafter MOGE) which was established in 2001 for improvement of women's right and interest, and social status. While the former government actively supported MOGE to branch out from campaign against householder system³ and legislation for Act on the Prevention of Sexual Traffic and Protection, etc. of Victims Thereof⁴ to a nurturing undertaking, and protecting the interest of immigrants women internationally married, MB government is denying the need of the MOGE. Women organizations and of all social standings criticized the attempt and succeeded to keep it, but the function of it has sharply curtailed.

This attempt is keeping a grasp on the actions of organizations for preventing and protecting sexual traffic and makes it to sink into atrophy. The independence of organizations providing consultation or shelters is being severely violated especially when they are funded by government organizations.

The slave trade of foreign women for sweated sex labor in military camp-side towns still exists in Korea. The actions of Korean women organizations such as Du-re Bang and international women organizations against the slave trade have slowed down the influx of foreign women for sweated sex labor, but the recent recession is causing more influx to military camp-side towns again.

They are be harassed with delayed payment due to the recession, and are forced out to voluntarily choose to sell the sex for their and their families' keep in this social frame.

Durebang researched on the actual condition of the foreign Sexual Traffic victims and requested to a Local Administration in Self Governing to build a supporting facility in

³ 'Hojuje', According to Chapter 4 in the former Civil Law, the Hoju system regulates the family-head (man takes priority) as the central person in a family.

⁴ Article 1 (Purpose): The purpose of this Act is to prevent sexual traffic, protect victims of sexual traffic and persons who have sex with people in exchange for money, and support their self-reliance

Pyun-taek. Pyung-taek is the place where the sex industry prevails the most and most of the women are foreigners, but there was not a single shelter or counseling facility. After putting lots of efforts, last July we finally built a shelter in Pyung-taek area. However, the city of Pyung-taek is rather skeptical about the institution and operation of the shelter.

Our voice and actions are might not arousing interest of the public, covered by bigger issues, and yet we can not stop acquainting the militarism-related problems and the real situations of victims, since it is so deeply rooted in our daily lives.

It was a huge disappointment to lose all the efforts and achievements we have made till now because of the new government, but we (SAFE) rather find this political situation as a new challenge to overcome. Against the interruption of communication, disregard for people's rights, and economical dictatorship of MB government, we will keep our solidarity with other actions for democracy and human rights, and work out the militarism and patriarchy of Korean society.