

**Official Event
Opening Ceremony**

**The 13th World Human Rights Cities Forum
Opening Remarks**

**KANG Gi-jung
[Mayor, Gwangju Metropolitan City]**

Honorable human rights leaders and activists from home and abroad,

I would like to welcome you to Gwangju on behalf of all 1.5 million Gwangju citizens. Also, I would like to pay respect to all of you who have been striving to protect and realize human rights at every corner of the globe.

Now the 13th World Human Rights Cities Forum is being held in Gwangju, the city of democracy, human rights, and peace. On the way coming along this far, the forum has presented grave agendas related to human rights circumstances around the world and offered a venue for open discussions to figure out solutions to the issues while learning from each nations' and cities' experiences.

This year's theme is <Human Rights Cities Responding to Poverty and Inequalities>. Now we are living in an era of urban. 54% of all global population are residing in urban areas. 90% of Koreans also are living in urbans. Moreover, out of more than 10,000 cities around the world, over 450 urbans have a population more than 1 million.

As main cause of issues that humanity has faced such as poverty, inequalities, pandemic, and climate crisis is derived from cities, solutions lie in cities themselves. As covid-19 has swept the world, the issues of poverty and inequalities have aggravated. On top of all, pressing climate crisis and international conflicts such as war in Ukraine have worsened and diversified the adversities of poverty and inequalities.

In 1995 at a time when Korea became a member of OECD, relative poverty rate in Korea was 8.3%, which means 8 out of 100 were in poverty with less than half of mid-income level. In 2020, however, that figure went up to 15.3%. Even though Korea has been elevated to advanced nation, the poverty rate has risen up by almost two times. A remarkable economic development has put Korea is regarded a member of a group of advanced nations, however, it does not necessarily mean that all Korean are affluent. For instance, Korea ranks the highest in Piketty Index that represents asset inequalities.

In Korea, the Piketty Index has risen from 5.8 times in 1995 to 8.8 times in 2021, 7.3 times higher than China that has been in an urgent situation because of serious level of inequalities. Korea's Piketty Index is at a really alarming level.

Asset inequality is not the only issue. An LGBT soldier was discharged even though the person wanted to keep the duty of service, then, suicided eventually. There is a case of a person who was not admitted by a university even though the person was born and grown up and attended school here in Korea. Even the same Koreans, people from Seoul and locals are treated differently in every aspect. Gaps between workers at large companies and SMEs and gaps between wages of male and female are the widest among countries around the world.

Addressing those complicated inequalities absolutely requires a good politics. We have to reduce economic inequalities. At the same time, we have to prevent economic inequalities from spreading throughout every aspect of our life including politics, society, and culture. There are people who have found it difficult to make their voices heard in a deep-down valley in this bumpy world. Gwangju now starts paying attention to the voices of them. The very first step is <Gwangjudaum Comprehensive Caring> launched last April.

Our neighbors' difficulties remind us the lives of those in the tail section in the movie Snowpiercer. Their lives seem to be difficult to improve with only just grants or benefits. <Inequal structure> has to be addressed, <spirit of community> and <equal relations> among members have to be recovered. We are not able to cope with inequalities of the 'Snowpiercer' with maintaining separation of the head and tail section and inequalities between passengers in the head and tail section.

'Caring' is a concept that makes democracy complete beyond just 'caring'. Every one of us once were grown up by being cared by others and would get older by being cared by others in later of our life, too. Even now we could lead our decent life as a member of community thanks to hidden hands of caring. The essence of 'caring democracy' lies in recognizing the underlying equality of humanity and implementing obligation of caring one another among members of community.

Gwangju intends to draw aprecedented practice to responding to inequality and making democracy more complete through caring. I hope the attempt of Gwangju could be widely spread to many other nations and cities to plant a small but robust seed to deal with common humanity challenges, poverty and inequalities.

Once again, I would like to welcome all participants and thank you all for attending the forum. I hope you could make a pleasant memory during your stay in Gwangju. Thank you very much.

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Mayor of Gwangju Metropolitan City, Kang Gijung