

**Thematic Session
Right to Housing**

We forced them into exile in the downtown

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Today, in Daein-dong and Gyerim-dong, Gwangju Metropolitan City, there are more than 100 people living in motels and inns that are hardly a home suitable for living. These people flocked to the motels and inns because they can't afford a deposit or just 50,000 won per month for housing maintenance fee. Most of them flowed into the motels and inns after suffering family breakdown or business failure, and becoming sick alone to be unable to sustain their lives on their own. They thought they would be able to leave this place one day, but despite receiving subsidies and housing benefits from the government, their lives have only become more difficult, making deposits and monthly housing costs still too burdensome. So, they end up here, a place even without a kitchen, far from minimum residential environment.

These so-called rough sleepers, who have been living in the non-residential space for more than three years, are named after their motel name and unit number. Their reality is a complete exile into a small cubicle, with no family, no friends, no neighbors, and no social life at all. Within the tiny place of exile, a bedroom area is filled with household goods that reveal the traces of their difficult lives, and a toilet is used for laundry, storage, and brief shower. This cannot be considered a proper residence to rest and recharge, and their safety is seriously jeopardized due to potential fire and electrical short. Since there is no separate kitchen space, most of them feed themselves with portable gas burners. This not only leads to high risk of fire, but health issues as well due to lack of decent meals. Furthermore, some motels that are particularly deteriorated have various items piled up in their hallways, stairs, and rooms, which are the living spaces, making them more vulnerable to fire. The surrounding environment also consists only of shopping malls, with no space for the leisure, exercise, or community activities of the rough sleepers.

Based on the indifference to our neighbors and the negative perception of the poor, we have unintentionally created a place of exile for the poor in the city center of Gwangju, a human rights city, for a long time. It is time for Gwangju, as a human rights city, to think deeply and act on how to change this place of exile of the poor, and how to treat and welcome those trapped in the exile.

While a factual survey is currently under way, more concrete measures to improve their lives, focusing on guaranteeing their right to housing, must be urgently prepared. The rough sleepers living in dangerous residential spaces are mostly elderly, financially challenged, and sick. From human rights perspective, alternatives must

be developed and implemented to guarantee their right to life, including their right to housing. To this end, a support organization should be first established to identify the current status of the rough sleepers, as well as to upgrade and relocate their housing. These efforts need to be associated with the improvement of the local residents' welfare and the local community. However, in order to address their right to housing and right to life, it is desirable not to stick to the existing welfare system, but to talk and interact with them and strengthen their own capabilities, so that each of them can rebuild the life they want.

People who have overcome many hardships and hardships to live in the human rights city of Gwangju are now sick and old, living in exile of poverty. Now we have to show them a truly welcoming civil society based on friendship and solidarity. That way, Gwangju can live up to the values of a human rights city.