

Honorable Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to be present at the consideration of the Consolidated 3rd and 4th Periodic Report, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea (ROK). I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to the distinguished members of the Committee of the Rights of the Child who are making earnest efforts to secure and promote the rights of the child. As a UN treaty-body monitoring the implementation of the Convention by member states, the Committee has contributed significantly to making the world a better place for children.

Before further elaborating on today's theme, please allow me to briefly introduce my delegation. Along with the permanent mission based at Geneva, the ROK delegation consists of 7 relevant Government bodies from the headquarters. Next to me, Director General Ms. Won-hee Lee from the Ministry of Health and Welfare is seated. Also present are representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Employment and Labor, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Mr. Chair,

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee have had a great impact on the ROK Government in its efforts to improve the rights of the child. Until the 1950s, the ROK pursued child policies that focused only on helping children in desperate need, such as those impoverished and orphaned. However, since the ratification of the Convention in 1991, the ROK has focused more on policies that consider the rights of the child from a universal human rights perspective. In this regard, thanks to the recommendations by the Committee, the ROK laws and institutions are now moving in a direction where the rights of the child are fully respected.

Despite such developments and efforts by the Government, we are still witnessing cases of prejudice against children and violation of the rights of the children. There is still progress to be made in order to assure that all children, across the board, are able to grow up with a full enjoyment of their due rights. I sincerely hope that today's consideration will be a good opportunity to facilitate child-friendly improvements within the ROK.

Since the ROK Government submitted the 3rd and 4th Periodic Report in 2008, the Government has engaged in several major initiatives including the amendment of laws and introduction of new systems, in order to further improve the rights of the child. Therefore, I will mainly try to summarize the measures taken by the ROK Government to implement the Convention, after submitting the Report in 2008.

<Authorization-based Adoption System>

The ROK Government has put forth considerable efforts to withdraw the reservations made to the Convention. The Government already withdrew its reservation to the child's right to maintain contact with parents in October 2008 and, as a result, we currently have only two remaining reservations to the Convention.

One of the most significant and recent improvements in this regard is the revision of "the Act on Special Cases Concerning Adoption" and "the Civil Code" in August 2011. Thanks to the revision, an approval by the Family Court is required, before an adoption becomes valid. When the revision takes effect, it would enable the withdrawal of the reservation to Art. 21 (a) of the Convention.

<Measures to Follow the General Principles>

To respect the views of the child, "the Enforcement Decree of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" was amended in March 2011. The amendment made it mandatory for schools to listen to the students, when enacting or amending school regulations on student life. Students are now also provided with more opportunities to take part in school steering committees.

Meanwhile, as part of the efforts to prevent school violence, 8 Government bodies joined in establishing “the Second Five-Year Plan on the Prevention of and Countermeasures against Violence in Schools” in 2010. “The Second Comprehensive Measures for Suicide Prevention” was developed in 2008 and “the Act on Prevention of Suicide and Creation of Culture that Respects Life” was enacted in 2011. The Act stipulates that a basic plan for the prevention of suicide shall be established every five years.

<Improvement in Family Environment and Alternative Care>

Measures to specify parents’ child-related responsibilities have been implemented. Divorce by agreement is only possible when consent is reached on the terms regarding child-raising, such as share of cost burdens. In addition, “the Civil Code” and “the Family Litigation Act” have been revised. The revision includes a stronger system enabling child support to be directly paid to the person who takes care of the child, without delay.

An alternative care system is being improved for “children in need” who do not have the benefit of parental care for various reasons. Group homes and foster care protection have been introduced to provide a family-like environment for the children. Financial support for foster families is provided as well, including child support subsidies, accident insurance or psychotherapy service for children and lease deposits for residential support.

<The Act on Supporting the Welfare of Disabled Children>

In terms of disability, “the Act on Supporting the Welfare of Disabled Children” has been enacted and will take effect in August 2012. The Act stipulates the establishment of comprehensive support measures for disabled children and their families. A system to provide services for them has been established and the Act covers health care, rehabilitation service and child care support for disabled children. The Government also ratified “the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” to abolish discrimination against the disabled in general.

<Revision of the Child Welfare Act and Welfare for Under-privileged Children>

“The Child Welfare Act” has been revised as well. Under the Act, it is now mandatory to conduct a comprehensive study of the status of children every five years and establish basic plans for adopting policies to new circumstances or developments. Also, in order to better prevent child abuse and protect the victims, a larger range of people are now responsible for reporting child abuse cases. Failure to comply with such obligations can lead to legal action being taken against that individual. The Act provides ground for support to the child victims and their families.

Welfare projects for the sake of under-privileged children are under way as well. Children Centers in town are being operated to provide educational support. There are programs that ease the cost burdens related to education. Child Development Accounts have been introduced to help children in need prepare for the future, by providing tuition fees, housing fees or money to start a business.

<Efforts towards Free Compulsory Education for Children>

With regard to free compulsory education for children, a “common curriculum for 5 year-old children” will be introduced and implemented in 2012. The Government is to take responsibility for the education and child care of all 5-year old children. This aims to provide quality education and child care, while easing related financial burdens.

<Measures for Children from Multicultural Families>

“The Support for Multicultural Families Act” has been amended to ensure a stable life without discrimination, for migrant children and their families. As a result, the scope of a multicultural family has been expanded. It now includes families comprised of persons who were recognized at birth by a father or a mother who is a Korean national and thus acquired Korean nationality or persons who obtained permission for naturalization. In addition, fact-finding surveys will be conducted on education for children of multicultural families, and educational programs to promote understanding of multiculturalism will be offered at schools.

<Protection from Sexual Violence>

In an effort to protect children from sexual violence, the Government has implemented a system that provides information about persons found guilty of committing sex crimes against children. The system, aimed at preventing such crimes, mails the information to local residents and educational facilities in the neighborhoods where the sex offenders live. To ensure fairness and proper protection, the victims of these crimes are guaranteed the right to counsel. If a victim does not have a lawyer, a prosecutor can appoint one for the victim. We expect that it will guarantee the rights and interests of children victims in legal proceedings.

<Improvement Regarding Juvenile Reformatories>

The systems regarding “the Juvenile Justice Act” and “The Act on the Treatment of Protected Juveniles, etc” have been improved, in order to prevent violations of the rights of the children who need special protection. For one thing, the human rights of the youth are being emphasized in the operation of juvenile reformatories. Overcrowding in reformatories has been on the decline since 2005. The daily average of juveniles in a reformatory has dropped 18.7% in 2009, compared to that of 2005.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,

The ROK Government has made substantial efforts to introduce administrative and legislative measures for the sake of children. Yet, at the same time, the Government is well aware that there is room for still more improvements to be made. I hope that the consideration of the Report today would, in this regard, provide a welcome opportunity for the ROK to be reminded of matters that need further consideration and additional efforts in the future. Thus, I assure you that my delegation is ready to contribute to the process with sincere responses to any concerns to be raised today.

Thank you. / END/

