

2013 World Human Rights Cities Forum

15-18 May 2013,
Gwangju, Republic of Korea

Press Release

The 3rd World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) was successfully concluded on 17 May 2013 with the adoption of the drafting Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City named "Gwangju Compact". The Gwangju Compact contains 10 principles including the right to the city which were considered essential for a city that embraces human rights as the key policy framework for the municipal administration.

Under the theme "Sustainable Human Rights City for All", over hundred participants from more than 40 countries participated in the two day meeting to discuss the role of the city and the local government in realizing human rights. In addition, thematic issues related to the city such as public architecture, disability, environment, children and youth, woman were also highlighted.

The opening ceremony was opened with an empowering keynote speech by Mr. Getachew Engida, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO and Mr. John Maresca, former Rector of the UN mandated University for Peace. Both speakers welcomed the idea of a human rights city as an effective means and strategy to implement internationally recognized human rights in the 21st century and emphasized the role of education and culture in broadening and deepening the vision of a human rights city.

Municipal human rights institutions and policies and human rights education for civil servants were two thematic topics discussed this year. Ms Eva Chueca from UCLG's Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights presented the role and activities of the Committee, specially the 1st World Summit of Local Governments on the Right to the City held in St Dennis, France in Dec. 2012 after the adoption of the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City adopted in Dec. 2011.

A special session was organized to review the draft Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City which was first formulated during the Forum in 2012 by a group of two dozen human rights experts both from Korea and abroad. The Guiding Principles known as the 'Gwangju Compact' in short is to be finalized at the 2014 Forum through further consultations with various key stakeholders including UN human rights experts, and a framework for its implementation is to be developed.

During the Forum, six young university students – each from China, Philippines and South Africa and 3 from Korea - presented their essays on human rights city at the final round of the 2nd international human rights city essay contest. Full text of those essays both in Korean and English can be found at the website www.humanrightscity.net

During the Forum, members of Executive Committee of the UCLG Asia-Pacific and Global Observatory on Local Democracies (GOLD) had their own meetings and the first

international conference for institutions holding human rights records registered to the UNESCO MOW (Memory of the World Programme) was also held in Gwangju as part of the 2013 WHRCF.

Mr Untae KANG, mayor of Gwangju promised to organize the 4th Forum in 2014 at the request of participants in his closing remarks at the closing ceremony.

Most participants attended the commemorative ceremony of the 33rd anniversary of the May 18 Democratization Movement in 1980 where Ms Gunhye Park, the President of Korea attended.

The Forum was organized by the Gwangju Metropolitan City, the host of the Forum and co-organizers such as the May 18 Memorial Foundation, the May 18th Institute, Ad-hoc Committee for Establishing May 18 Archives and the Korea Human Rights Foundation.

Gwangju is known as one of key leading human rights cities in Korea under the leadership of Mr Untae Kang, the current Mayor, who made a human rights city as his election campaign. Following the adoption of the Human Rights Ordinance in 2009, the first of its kind in Korea, the human rights office was created with a full-scale municipal human rights action plans accompanied by a set of 100 human rights indicators. Gwangju has continued to make progress toward a full-fledged human rights city by adopting the Gwangju Human Rights Charter in 2012 and creating a human rights ombudsman in 2013.

The World Human Rights Cities Forum which started in 2011 has brought about more than 50 representatives from cities and organizations for mutual learning and exchange about how to build a human rights city. Historically, Gwangju has been known as 'capital of democracy' owing to her role in democratization movement in the 1980s. Hundreds of youths and citizens were killed by security forces in May 1980 during people's uprising against the proclamation of martial law by the military junta. Their sacrifices were later recognized politically as an important contribution to the democratization movement, and compensation was made to the victims and their family members. The Forum is understood as a way to realize 'the Gwangju Spirit' internationally born during the May 18 democratization movement 1980.

Annex

- Draft Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City (Gwangju Compact) (17 May 2013)
- 2013 WHRCF Statement (17 May 2013)

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