

World Human Rights Cities Forum 2017

Do we live in peace? Human Rights Cities, Democracy and Practice

14 – 17 September, 2017
Gwangju Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea

Background and Overview

1. World Human Rights Cities Forum 2017 (WHRCF 2017, hereinafter referred to as 2017 Gwangju Forum) is an international forum held in Gwangju City, Republic of Korea to implement the vision of a human rights city as articulated in the Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities, adopted in May 2011 at the first World Human Rights Cities Network. The World Human Rights Cities Forum upholds and further develops the spirit of the May 18 Democratization Movement, during which thousands of innocent citizens were victimized by state violence 37 years ago, along with the value of the 1998 Asian Human Rights Charter declared in Gwangju.
2. A human rights city, as defined in the [Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities in 2011](#), is a local community playing a significant role based on fundamental values and guidelines of human rights, and a social and political process. The Gwangju Forum, with the attendance of delegations of human rights cities from South Korea and abroad, human rights experts, human rights NGOs, journalists and citizens, has explored effective systems and their implementations practically guaranteeing human rights of citizens in their daily life, positioning it as a representative human rights cities forum.
3. A total of 928 people have participated in the Gwangju Forum as speakers, presenters and discussants over the past six years, including 392 people from 159 countries. Representative human rights experts from South Korea and abroad, including Commissioner and Chair of the New York City Commission on Human Rights Patricia Gatling, Deputy High Commissioner of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) KANG Kyung-hwa, UNESCO's Deputy Director-General Getachew Engida and President of International Coalition Maria L. Zarate, have shared their expertise and experiences in the previous Gwangju Forums.

4. The concerted endeavors and collaborative efforts of the international human rights communities and the Gwangju Forums led to the report of the United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the “Role of Local Government in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights” in September 2015 (A/HRC/30/49), which emphasized the responsibilities of local governments and states for the protection of human rights. In its report, the Advisory Committee also emphasized that local governments together with states are crucial actors responsible for the protection of human rights such as education, health, housing, environment, law and order, and the right to water because of their proximity to citizens and their functions to provide public services. The Gwangju Forum will further its efforts in finalizing the local government and human rights guidelines at the level of the UNHRC, in order to effectively implement recommendations stated in the above UN report.
5. The 2017 Gwangju Forum will be held at the Kimdaejung Convention Center in Gwangju City, Republic of Korea, from 14 to 17 September 2017. An estimated 1,000 participants from South Korea and abroad are expected to take part in the Forum, including municipal representatives seeking a human rights city, UN human rights experts, representatives from [UCLG CISDP](#) (United Cities and Local Governments Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights) and UCLG ASPAC (United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific), human rights NGOs, local parliamentarians, academics and representatives from human rights cities.

Theme and Domestic/International Contexts

1. The theme, “Do we live in peace? Human Rights Cities, Democracy and Practice” was chosen for the 2017 Gwangju Forum. Amid ongoing, mounting upheaval and conflicts around the world, the Forum will serve as a space to offer an insight into the world we are living in through the value of peace and seek a better future for human rights cities. Peace is a fundamental, crucial condition buttressing human rights and democracy, and a significant value to be implemented through human rights and democracy.
2. Gwangju is a city that has safeguarded democracy and human rights in defiance of unjust governmental authorities. In May 1980, many Gwangju citizens were sacrificed as they fought against the then-military regime’s oppressive rule and advocated for democracy and social justice requesting martial law to be limited and the release of pro-democracy activists. In particular, from 21 to 27 May 1980, Gwangju citizens established a unified community based

on sharing and solidarity, which defended and embraced one another sharing home-made rice balls and voluntarily donating blood to the wounded amid fears of death in a city besieged by tanks and soldiers. Since then, Gwangju has continuously tried to disseminate the Gwangju Spirit represented in the form of “democracy, human rights and peace” nationally and internationally. These accomplishments will continue to advance as human life progresses.

- A. The Gwangju Spirit is in line with the concept of a tolerant city, one of the major urban agendas at the UN Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador held in October 2016. In this regard, it is meaningful to discuss how we can promote peace and implement citizens’ participatory democracy this year in a city of such a historical significance.
3. The last decade witnessed the rise of citizen resistance against the deterioration of democracy and human rights around the world. In 2016 South Koreans peacefully removed the corrupt government officials and political leaders, overcoming the limits of representative democracy and enhancing the prospect of participatory democracy by citizens as a sovereign entity. South Korea’s candlelight revolution was preceded by the 2011 Tunisian jasmine revolution, which led to the ousting of the dictatorial government, the 2014 Hong Kong Protest or the Umbrella Movement, and the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement in Taiwan. On a large-scale, citizens began to directly exercise their sovereignty and plaza democracy regardless of their gender, age and social class, presenting specific demands and voices to build regional communities, guarantee democracy and human rights, respect diversity, and embrace socially vulnerable and underprivileged people, beyond the political opposition towards a certain administration.
 4. However, democracy and human rights are facing a crisis globally as diversity and tolerance are in decline in many parts of the world. The Philippine Government’s war on drugs declared in June 2016 resulted in the immediate execution of thousands of criminal suspects. An estimated 150 newspaper and TV broadcasting companies were forcibly shut down in the name of prevention of terrorism through the martial law and state of emergency declared in Turkey, while cracking down on civilian and pro-democracy activists demanding freedom of speech. The elements posing a threat to peace are not limited to such conflicts and political disputes. People’s fury and discontent due to the unequal distribution of wealth and severe social polarization has led to the deterioration of tolerance towards immigrants, the socially vulnerable and underprivileged and claim from some to protect their own people within their

communities as shown in the election of Donald Trump as the U.S. president and the withdrawal of the U. K. from the European Union (Brexit).

5. [The Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities](#), adopted in May 2011 at the first WHRCF, claims that a “Human rights city” means, in practical terms, that all inhabitants, regardless of race, sex, color, nationality, ethnic background and social status, and in particular minorities and any other vulnerable groups who are socially vulnerable and marginalized, can participate fully in decision-making and policy-implementation processes that affect their lives in accordance with such human rights principles as non-discrimination, the rule of law, participation, empowerment, transparency and accountability. The 2017 Gwangju Forum will serve as space to promote discussion between and among human rights cities on relevant issues and themes such as state violence, the elderly and village communities, while strengthening and expanding participatory democracy and direct democracy in various communities.

Objectives and Direction of the 2017 Gwangju Forum

Through the 2017 Gwangju Forum, we will reconfirm the significance of democracy in human rights cities by reviewing the world in terms of peace and discussing five ways of implementation toward its further expansion and development.

First, sharing the experiences of South Korea’s candlelight revolution Hong Kong’s umbrella movement and Taiwan’s sunflower student movement will provide impetus for-participants to explore implementable measures to expand and strengthen participatory democracy and civil autonomy as a practical mechanism of guarantee human rights.

Second, following results and discussions from the [2016 WHRCF](#), held under the theme of “Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities: Urban Development, Housing, and Environment,” in an attempt to seek a human rights-based approach to the right to the city at the level of regional communities, implementable measures will be discussed to overcome social conflicts arising in various areas of a human rights city and to build a tolerant city. The 2017 Gwangju Forum will accordingly add village communities as one of the thematic sessions, in order to discuss issues of civil autonomy in the place of our daily life.

Third, the Asia Local Democracy and Human Rights Cities Network (Asia LDC Net) was established

primarily by civil society organizations from the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea, who participated in the 2016 WHRCF. By adding the Asia LDC Net Session, the 2017 Gwangju Forum is eyeing to become representative for Asia forum offering opportunities for representatives of like-minded Asian cities to freely share and discuss human rights policies and systems.

Fourth, a new session was added in the 2016 WHRCF for local government officials and human rights citizen committee members of Korea. It will be expanded to share experiences of participants while main-streaming and implementing human rights policies at the local government level.

Fifth, in preparation of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the declaration of Asia Human Rights Charter in Gwangju in 2018, the significance of the Asian Human Rights Charter will be reviewed, while attempting to discuss the necessity and direction of human rights protection mechanism in Asian areas as in American and European countries.

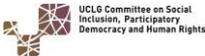
Agenda and Program Structure

1. The 2017 Gwangju Forum begins with an opening ceremony and a plenary round-table with heads of local governments and human rights experts. A plenary session explores the future of democracy and human rights while discussing the cases of South Korea's candlelight rallies, Hong Kong's umbrella movement and Taiwan's sunflower student movement. The closing ceremony will adopt the 2017 WHRCF declaration.
2. Thematic sessions consist of nine areas including state violence, the elderly, village communities, social economy, gender, child/youth, migrants/refugees, disability, and environment with close attention to citizens living. Simultaneous interpretation in English and Korean will be provided for plenary sessions and respective thematic sessions.
3. Special sessions will include an expert workshop on Local Government and Human Rights Guidelines, a Sweden' Human Rights Day event, and networking sessions of Asian Human Rights Cities, South Korea's Human Rights Cities and Human Rights Committees.
4. Participants will enjoy the opportunity to visit traditional markets, the Gwangju Trauma Center, the May 18 National Cemetery, and the UNESCO Human Rights Documentary Heritage 1980 Archives for the May 18th Democratic Uprising.

Hosts, Organizers and Sponsors

1. The 2017 Gwangju Forum is co-hosted by Gwangju Metropolitan City, a co-chair city of UCLG CISDP (United Cities and Local Governments Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights), and Gwangju Metropolitan Office of Education, and co-organized by the Gwangju International Center (GIC) and UCLG-CISDP.
2. The Forum is sponsored by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, National Human Rights Commission of Republic of Korea, United Nation Human Rights Office(Seoul), Korea Human Rights Foundation, Korean National Commission for UNESCO, and the Asia-Pacific Center for Education for International Understanding and the Global Platform for the Right to the City.

Hosted by  GWANGJU METROPOLITAN CITY  Gwangju Metropolitan Office Of Education

Organized by  Gwangju International Center  UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights