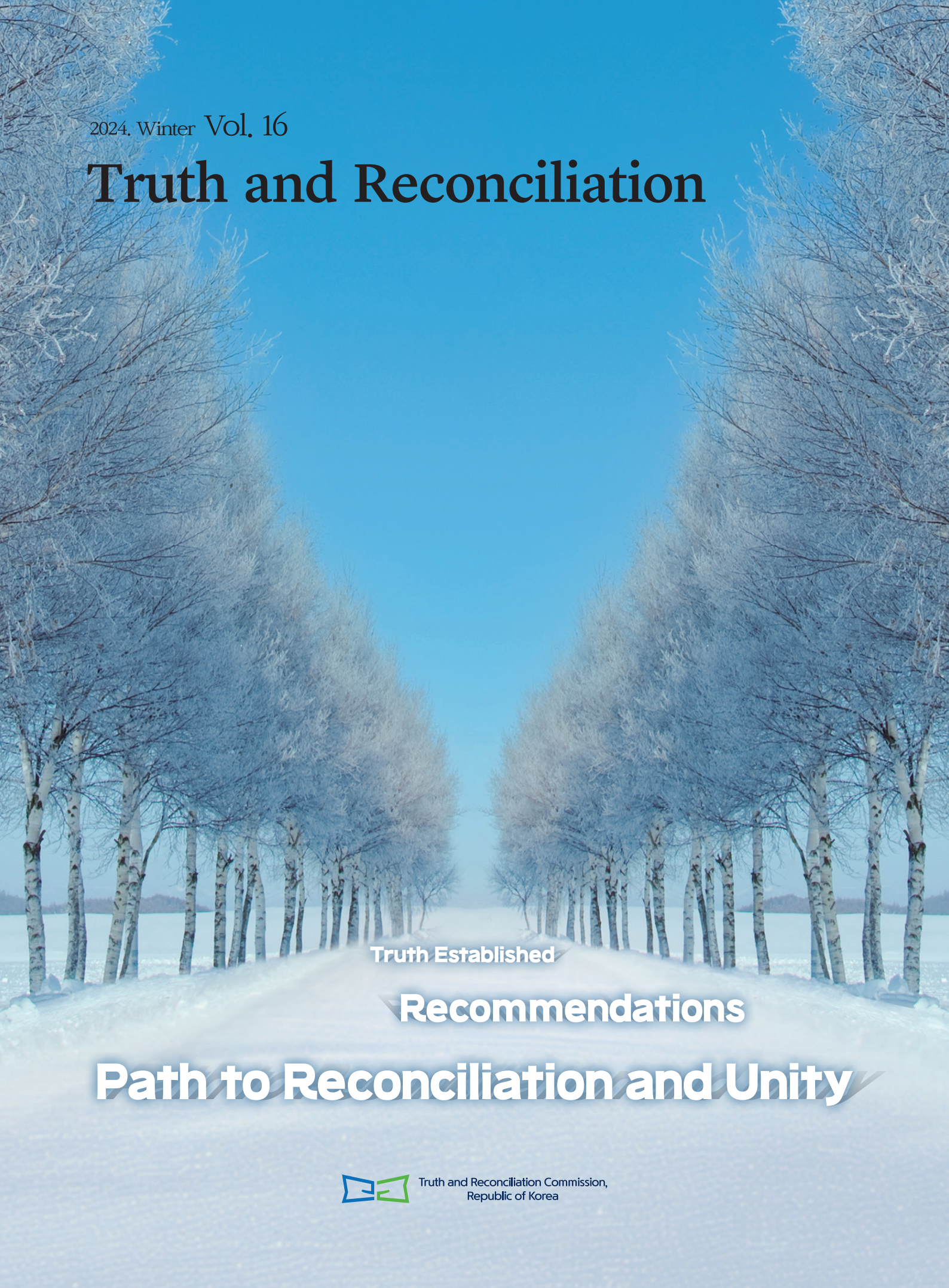
2024. Winter Vol. 16

Truth and Reconciliation

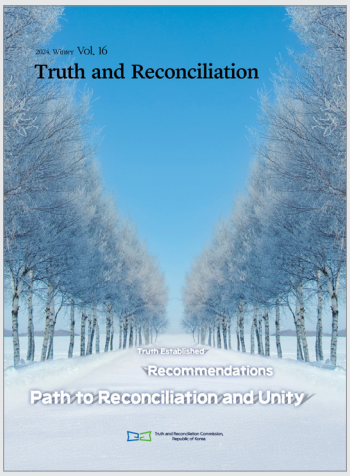


Truth Established

Recommendations

Path to Reconciliation and Unity

Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
Republic of Korea



The snow-covered path where
the sky meets the earth,
We walk step by step in search
of the truth.
Untangling the knots of history,
We move forward on the path
of reconciliation and unity.
In 2025,
the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission will leave
no case behind,
And will shine the light
of truth.

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ISSN 2983-1628

Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
Republic of Korea

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Korea was relaunched on December 10 of 2020 following the revision of the Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation.

The amendment was made as a response to the urgent calls of the survivors and victims' families who have sought truth and justice for past state violence.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an independent investigative body that seeks to uncover the truth about Korean Independence Movement against Imperial Japan, history of the Korean diaspora overseas, civilians killed during the Korean War, various human rights violations during the authoritarian rule, and casualties by hostile forces. Through this, we strive to move towards a better future.

Our Commission will do our best in leading the way to uncovering the truth.

Legal Basis	Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation (amended on June 9, 2020)
Investigation Period	Three years from the date of the first decision to investigate (May 27, 2021). Extended for one year until May 26, 2025.
Activity Period	Six months after the end of investigations until November 26, 2025. Preparation of the Final Comprehensive Report.

2024. Winter Vol. 16

Publisher Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea
Date of Publication December 31, 2024. Vol. 16
Reporter/Editor External Relations Division
Website www.jinsil.go.kr
Address 5F and 6F, Namsan Square Building, 173, Toegye-ro, Jung-gu, 04554, Seoul, Republic of Korea

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Inauguration:
PARK Sun-young, Third Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

"Shall make best efforts to serve as a solid cornerstone that provides our society with a strong foundation for reconciliation and integration."

PARK Sun-young (68), newly appointed chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (hereinafter "TRCK"), commenced her official duties following her inauguration ceremony on December 10, 2024 in the Commission's main conference room in Jung-gu, Seoul. Succeeding former chairpersons JUNG Keun-sik and KIM Kwang-dong, PARK is the third to assume the role since the launch of the second Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She will serve as chairperson for the remaining term of the Commission which is until November 2025. If the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation* is amended to extend the Commission's term, she will continue her activities for an additional two years until December 9, 2026.

In her inaugural speech, Chairperson PARK Sun-young stated, "It feels like a heavy weight has been put on my shoulders and heart given the critical juncture we are at both domestically and internationally. I begin my tenure as chairperson with a commitment to ensuring that South Korea moves toward a more just and harmonious future." She further expressed her vision, saying, "I will reset the compass that we have lost so that our society can move toward a harmonious future, and will ensure that the Commission operates more efficiently and fairly from a balanced perspective."

PARK emphasized that the TRCK is an independent investigative body established to move the nation forward through reconciliation and healing. "Our Commission pursues two core values: truth and reconciliation. Truth begins with the discovery and acknowledgement of objective facts. Truth, once lost, requires a great deal of time and effort to recover. However, it is something we must unavoidably seek and uncover," said PARK. The Chairperson further outlined the purpose of the Commission by saying, "The Commission is not merely a place for investigating past incidents but must serve as a foundation for restoring public trust and paving the way for the future." To this end, she expressed strong determination, emphasizing that all members of the Commission would do their utmost to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them by the Constitution and law. On a final note, Chairperson PARK Sun-young stressed, "I sincerely hope that the Commission serves as a solid cornerstone that provides our society with a strong foundation for reconciliation and integration, rather than a melting pot of conflict."

On December 17, 2024, PARK presided over her first Regular Meeting of Commissioners (93rd Meeting), addressing cases related to civilian casualties during

the Korean War and human rights violations under authoritarian regimes. As a constitutional scholar and education expert, PARK has accumulated extensive experience and insight across journalism, academia, and politics. She is particularly recognized for her significant contributions to elevating North Korean human rights issues as a key agenda in South Korean society.

Born in 1956 in Chuncheon, Gangwon-do, PARK graduated from Ewha Womans University Law School and earned her doctorate in law from Seoul National University. She worked for 12 years as an announcer and reporter at MBC before transitioning to academia, serving as a professor of law at Catholic University and later at Dongguk University. PARK eventually entered politics, becoming a proportional representative for the Liberty Forward Party in the 18th National Assembly. During her tenure, she served on the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Unification Committee, the Gender Equality and Family Committee, and the Special Committee on Measures for the Protection of Dokdo Territory. Until recently, she was active as the president of the Mulmangcho Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting so called, "victims of history," including Korean War POWs and North Korean defectors.







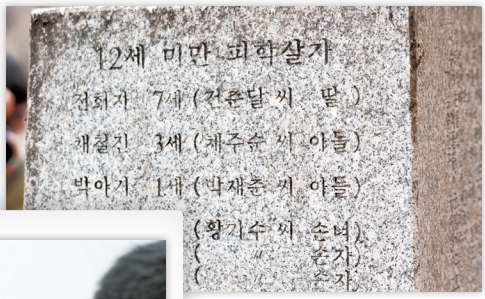


1. Chairperson PARK Sun-young presides over her first Regular Meeting of Commissioners (93rd Meeting) on December 17, 2024 at the Commission's office in Jung-gu, Seoul.
2. Chairperson PARK Sun-young delivers her inaugural address at the inauguration ceremony held on December 10, 2024.
3. Visit to the National Cemetery (middle).
4. Scene of the inauguration ceremony.

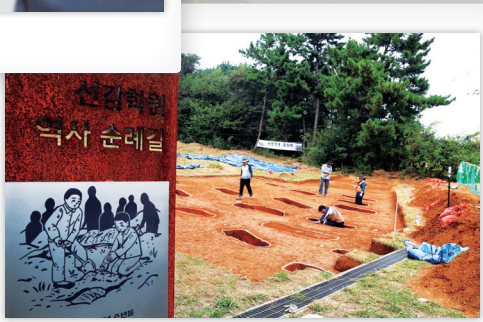
Policy Recommendation

TRCK Recommends to both the Government and National Assembly the Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Foundation









The TRCK has recommended to the Government and the National Assembly the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Foundation (tentatively named) to continue national reconciliation efforts beyond the Commission's end of term on November 26, 2025. This decision was reached on November 5, 2024, during its 90th Meeting, when it adopted the *Policy Recommendation for the Establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Foundation.* On November 19, the recommendation was delivered to both the Office of the President and the National Assembly.

The Truth and Reconciliation Foundation would serve as a permanent institution to preserve and manage the extensive data collected and produced during the Commission's investigations, support additional fact-finding initiatives, and implement reconciliation measures following the tenure of the Commission. The establishment of such a permanent institution was first proposed under the name “Foundation for Research on the Past” in the first version of the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*, enacted on May 31, 2005. Afterwards, it was consistently reflected as well in three subsequent amendments to the *Framework Act*.

According to Article 40 of the *Framework Act*, “the

Government may contribute funds to establish the Foundation on the Research of the Past." Furthermore, it stipulates that the Foundation shall be responsible for the following projects: 1) Memorial projects and the operation and management of archives; 2) Support for further truth-seeking projects; and 3) Support for cultural and academic activities related to truth-seeking.

The First Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2006-2010) had also adopted a *Policy Proposal for the Establishment of a Past Affairs Research Foundation* on July 7, 2009, and had recommended it to the Government and the National Assembly. However, no concrete discussions about its implementation occurred.

In its second term, the Commission hired third-party researchers to complete the *Study on the Development of a Reconciliation Model and Plans for the Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Foundation* between August 2023 and April 2024. This process allowed the TRCK to gather diverse opinions from academia experts, bereaved family organizations, and other stakeholders. As a result, since May 2024, the TRCK has been preparing its recommendation through its internally organized "Task Force for the Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Foundation."

The TRCK's policy recommendation includes the background of the proposal, the basis and necessity for establishing a foundation, its nature and structure, key projects, organization and budget, and the recommendation itself. Particularly, the recommendation proposes establishing the foundation as a special legal entity through the enactment of a separate law, to ensure the independence it should have as stipulated in Article 40 of the *Framework Act*. To ensure the independence and diversity of the board of directors, the recommendation proposes that candidates be appointed by the President according to a predetermined ratio of candidates nominated respectively by the government, local governments, and negotiating groups, or be selected from a pool of candidates recommended by a separate body tasked with recommending suitable candidates.

"The ultimate purpose of addressing past incidents lies in preventing recurrence and fostering national unity," said an official at the TRCK. "An independent, permanent institution is needed to consistently carry forward and develop the achievements and the truth-seeking efforts of the Commission. We are working to ensure that the foundation is launched before the Commission's term concludes."



"Island Boys," a Documentary Depicting the Human Rights Violations at Seongam Academy is Released

● REC

High-Quality Documentary Crafted Over a Year by the TRCK

Featuring Vivid Testimonies from Surviving Victims

Story by | PARK Gil-ja **Photos by** | TRCK

50-minute, high-quality 4K UHD documentary.
Narrated by former public relations ambassador JANG Hyun-sung.

Unembellished storytelling based on records and testimonies, mixed with artistic editing. The stunning visuals evoke sorrow and anger, reflecting the anguish of the boys trapped on Seongamdo Island, their "natural prison."

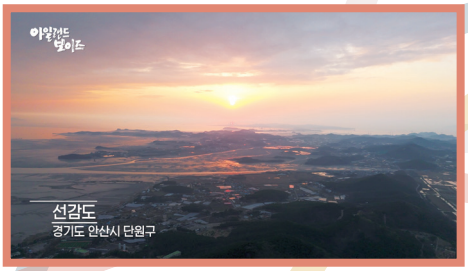
A documentary featuring vivid testimonies from surviving victims of the case of *Human Rights Violations of Children at Seongam Academy,* on which the TRCK issued truth decisions twice in 2022 and 2024, has been released.

The TRCK, in collaboration with Stove Cat Studio, developed and produced "*Island Boys - The Secret of Seongam Academy,*" a 50-minute, high-quality 4K UHD documentary. The documentary, which took a year to make, is notable for its unembellished storytelling based on records and testimonies, mixed with artistic editing. Underwater photography and sequences of natural landscapes, featuring exceptional performances by child actors, convey a devastating sense of despair as they juxtapose the gorgeous views with the anguish of the boys trapped on Seongamdo Island, their "natural prison." Actor JANG Hyun-sung, who previously served as the public relations ambassador for the TRCK, willingly accepted the offer to narrate the documentary.

Seongamdo Island … "Hell's Island" where "children were treated like animals."

Actual survivors of the Seongam Academy incident featured in the documentary described life at Seongam Academy as "hell," testifying that "children were treated like animals."

Established in 1942 during the Japanese colonial period, Seongam Academy lasted 40 years through liberation from Japan, the Korean War, and South Korea's era of "compressed growth," before closing its doors in 1982. Children were forcibly brought here because they were classified as "vagrants" who needed to be "cleansed"



from society. Many of the children were brutally rounded up merely to meet government quotas, and once on "Hell's Island," escape was nearly impossible. Numerous children perished because their feet became trapped in tidal mudflats during escape attempts, while others were beaten to death if caught. Hundreds of children were buried without grave mounds or headstones. The grim task of burying those who died while trying to flee was likewise assigned to the remaining boys.

"This is a documentary I want to show the perpetrators."

The documentary reveals the harrowing process of ordinary boys being forcibly interned at Seongam Academy, falling victim to state violence. It also portrays their adult lives where they marry and have families but struggle with trauma. Viewers are overcome with anger when they see how such traumatic events often result in broken families.

PARK Tae-sik, President of the Korean Film Critics Association and former professor at Sungkonghoe University, remarked, "Despite its exotic title, the documentary exposes a dark and appalling chapter in our history, a past many would prefer to ignore. Watching the horrific human rights violations at Seongam Academy made me want to look away." He added, "Who abused these innocent children? Are they still living? Have they apologized for their atrocities? This is a documentary I wish they could see."

Island Boys aired simultaneously on terrestrial MBC-TV and Wavve (OTT platform) on November 25, 2024, at 12:15 a.m. It is also available for viewing on the TRCK's official YouTube channel, MBC's YouTube channel, and Wavve's on-demand service.













"Significant Contribution to the Defense of South Korea's Sovereignty" - Additional Participants Confirmed Beyond the 642 Documented Members

On November 19, 2024, during its 91st Meeting, the TRCK recognized the "Participation of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan in the Korean War" as it made its decision to establish the truth in this case. Previously, during its 72nd Meeting in February, the TRCK determined that there was substantial evidence to deem the participation of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan in the Korean War as a historically significant event warranting an investigation. As a result, the Commission launched an *ex-officio* investigation into this matter.

Members gave up their studies and jobs ··· deployed in five waves.

Investigators concluded that when the Korean War broke out, PARK Woon-wook (President of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan Comrades Association and the only surviving member) and PARK Byung-heon (former leader of Mindan Korean Residents Union in Japan), along with other right-wing students and youth residing in Japan, volunteered to fight in the Korean War. Despite not being subject to military conscription or summoned by their homeland, they gave up their studies and jobs to help save their war-torn country.

The Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan was deployed in five waves, from the first to the fifth contingents. Except for those in the fifth contingent, the members were not assigned military service numbers and were instead attached to U.S. or South Korean forces. Among those assigned to U.S. forces, some later integrated into the South Korean military, passed officer exams to serve as commissioned officers, or participated in combat as non-commissioned officers or enlisted soldiers, achieving notable contributions.

An estimated 260 members of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan who received discharge orders in South Korea returned to Japan by February 1952. However, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty went into force in April 1952, restoring Japan's sovereignty as an independent nation, the Japanese government refused to allow the return of the

remaining members of the Student Volunteer Force. As a result, when the Armistice Agreement was signed in July 1953, around 240 members discharged from their respective units were unable to return to Japan and were forced to settle in South Korea.

The TRCK's *ex-officio* investigation confirmed the participation of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan in the Korean War and identified that there were more members involved than the 642 volunteers previously recorded in the *History of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan's Participation in the Korean War*. In accordance with the *Framework Act*, the TRCK recommended that relevant agencies accurately determine the exact number of participants and their contributions, and advised that the spirit of patriotism and dedication demonstrated by the Student Volunteer Force in defending their homeland should be actively incorporated into history textbooks.



The Korean National Flag (*Taegeukgi*) exhibited at the War Memorial of Korea. It bears inscriptions such as "September 6, 1950," "Deployment of Student Volunteer Soldiers," "Patriotism," "Defend our Homeland," and "Saviors of the Nation," reflecting the determination of the members of the Student Volunteer Force at the time of their deployment. @ War Memorial of Korea

Truth Revealed in the Suspicious Deaths of KIM Du-hwang, HAN Hee-chul, and KIM Yong-kwon State Must Apologize and Restore Honor

KIM Du-hwang

"Forced conscription and 'Greening Project' confirmed ⋯ reconciliation measures recommended."

HAN Hee-chul

"Attempted to be used as an informant ⋯ family members were put under surveillance."

KIM Yong-kwon

"Abused by Defense Security Unit ⋯ case cover-up confirmed."

The truth has been established for the deaths of KIM Du-hwang, HAN Hee-chul, and KIM Yong-kwon, who died under suspicious circumstances after being forcibly conscripted into the military during the CHUN Doo-hwan regime in the 1980s for their involvement in the student movement.

Cases of Suspicious Deaths in the Military occurred under the direction of the Defense Security Command, where individuals with histories of student activism were illegally detained or ill-treated after being either forcibly conscripted or enlisted through normal procedures. Beginning in September 1982, under the pretext of "preventing leftist ideological contamination" and to engage in so called purification activities such as the "Greening Project," the government coerced military recruits to infiltrate student bodies and serve as informants (Operation "*Fraktysia*"). In this process, many were illegally detained and tortured, leading to direct or indirect deaths.

The suspicious death of KIM Du-hwang comes to light after 41 years.

On December 3, 2024, during its 92nd Meeting, the TRCK established the truth in the case of the **"Suspicious Death of KIM Du-hwang"** and ruled that there had been serious violations of human rights.

KIM was forcibly conscripted on March 18, 1983 for participating in the student movement while attending Korea University. After his enlistment, as part of the "Greening Project," KIM was pressured by the Defense Security Command to provide a list of names of fellow students who were involved in the student movement. Later, he was found dead from a gunshot wound inflicted by his own firearm, while on night watch duty. The TRCK conducted a thorough investigation into this case, using records obtained from state agencies, the applicant's statement, and numerous testimonies from other victims of forced conscription and the "Greening Project," as well as soldiers who served in the same unit.

The investigation revealed that on March 8, 1983, KIM was taken to the Seongbuk Police Station, where he endured ill-treatment during interrogation. Ten days later, on March 18, he was forcibly conscripted as a "special recruit" and sent to the 103rd Replacement Battalion under the custody of police officers from the Seongbuk Police Station. During his military service, KIM faced discrimination in unit assignments and duties due to his forced conscription. Notably, he was a subject of the "Greening Project," which involved coercion by the Defense Security Command to provide the names of his fellow student activists. This led to severe psychological distress, ultimately resulting in his death.

The TRCK issued a statement, saying, "This case constitutes a serious violation of human rights resulting in death from illegal detention and ill-treatment by investigative authorities, as well as systematic and organized forced conscription and the 'Greening Project' carried out unlawfully by the State." It further recommended that "the State should issue an apology to the bereaved family members and take appropriate measures to achieve reconciliation."

"The military, which should be dedicated to the sacred duty of national defense, was used as a tool to maintain the regime, leading to the deaths of innocent young people. The decision to establish the truth about human rights violations caused by illegal acts such as forced conscription and the 'Greening Project' carried out by the State is a meaningful achievement. We will continue to do our utmost to ensure that injustices caused by governmental power are brought to light," said Standing Commissioner LEE Sang-hoon.

Cases of Suspicious Deaths in the Military

"Beaten for more than two hours daily ··· family was told to cremate the remains."

On December 3, 2024, during its 92nd Meeting, the TRCK established the truth in the case of the "Suspicious Death of HAN Hee-chul" and ruled that there had been serious violations of human rights.

On December 5, 1983, HAN was taken from his unit at 5th Division Headquarters to the Gwacheon branch of the Defense Security Command, where he was interrogated and tortured for being a candidate for the "Greening Project." Five days later he returned to his unit and was found dead while on guard duty on the morning of December 11, the day before the Defense Security Command's scheduled follow-up investigation.

The TRCK ruled that the Defense Security Command's "Greening Project," which was carried out from September 1982 to December 1984, was a human rights-violating policy that involved serious violations of human rights accompanied by violence, causing deaths and leading to numerous social problems and conflicts. Furthermore, the Commission stated that, while more thorough management and supervision of the "Greening Project" was required, the State (Ministry of National Defense and Defense Security Command) had neglected and abandoned its duties, causing the death of HAN, who was faithfully fulfilling his military duties. The TRCK discovered new facts during its recent investigation through records obtained from state agencies such as the National Archives, as well as testimonies from the applicant and other witnesses.

The investigation revealed that the Defense Security Command attempted to use HAN as an informant. Also, after HAN's death, from March 1984 to April 1989, for about six years, authorities conducted surveillance on his bereaved family, violating their privacy and freedom. During interrogations for the "Greening Project," HAN was beaten for more than two hours daily, with assault tools including a 70-80cm club and a stainless steel tape measure. Furthermore, in an effort to conceal traces of abuse, the military and the Defense Security Command persuaded the bereaved family, who insisted on burying the body, to cremate the remains, citing it as "military custom," and the pallbearer was ordered not to allow the family to open the coffin or inspect the body.

The TRCK recommended that the State (Ministry of National Defense, Defense Security Command – currently the Defense Counterintelligence Command) officially apologize to HAN and his bereaved family for the serious human rights violations that were committed under the guise of national defense duties. The Commission further urged the State to take appropriate measures for compensation, restitution, and the restoration of honor, and to ensure that such unjust human rights violations, driven by reasons such as maintaining political power, do not occur again in the military.





"KIM Yong-kwon, driven to an extreme situation, resulting in death."

On September 24, 2024, during its 87th Meeting, the TRCK established the truth in the case of the "Suspicious Death of KIM Yong-kwon" and ruled that there had been serious violations of human rights.

KIM, who voluntarily enlisted for the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) while attending Seoul National University, was found dead in February 1987 in his barracks, having hanged himself. The TRCK conducted a thorough investigation of this case by obtaining records from state agencies, the applicant's statement, statements from Defense Security Unit personnel, additional materials from the Defense Security Command, and a statement from Defense Security Unit Sergeant CHOO [NAME REDACTED], who was identified as the perpetrator.

The investigation revealed that Sergeant CHOO and others, illegally detained KIM following the Defense Security Command's "Instructions to Apprehend Student Activists" and the security unit commander's instructions to "submit intelligence on student protesters." During this period, CHOO and others, coerced KIM into becoming an informant and severly abused him, including beatings. As a result, KIM provided a 14-page report, and the names listed in the report were later cross-checked against the list of wanted student activists.

The TRCK concluded that KIM, who had been active in the student movement, suffered severe mental and physical distress due to the continuous abuse and coercion to engage in informant activities by the security unit. KIM was driven to an unbearable and extreme situation, ultimately leading him to choose death. In addition, despite being informed of the issues within a security unit under its command by the 6th Army Corps Military Police in its report, "*Detention and Torture by Sergeant CHOO [NAME REDACTED],*" the Defense Security Command tried to minimize the incident and cover it up as a case of common suicide. Despite knowing that KIM committed suicide as a result of severe mental and physical trauma caused by ill-treatment and abuse, the DSC omitted from its report that he was detained and interrogated by security personnel.

The TRCK recommended that the State (Ministry of National Defense) officially apologize for the serious human rights violations committed in the name of military duty, as well as compensate the victim and his family for the mental and material harm suffered as a result of the illegal greening operations and take measures to restore his honor.

The Zelkova Tree Revealed the Graves of that Day

The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Gimcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do

Writings and photos by | KANG Byun-gu
Author of *The Story of Peace Told by the Island*

> They said someone from one of the families planted a zelkova tree.
> So we started looking for the thickest and largest trees at Dolgogae … and sure enough, we found bodies beneath one of them!

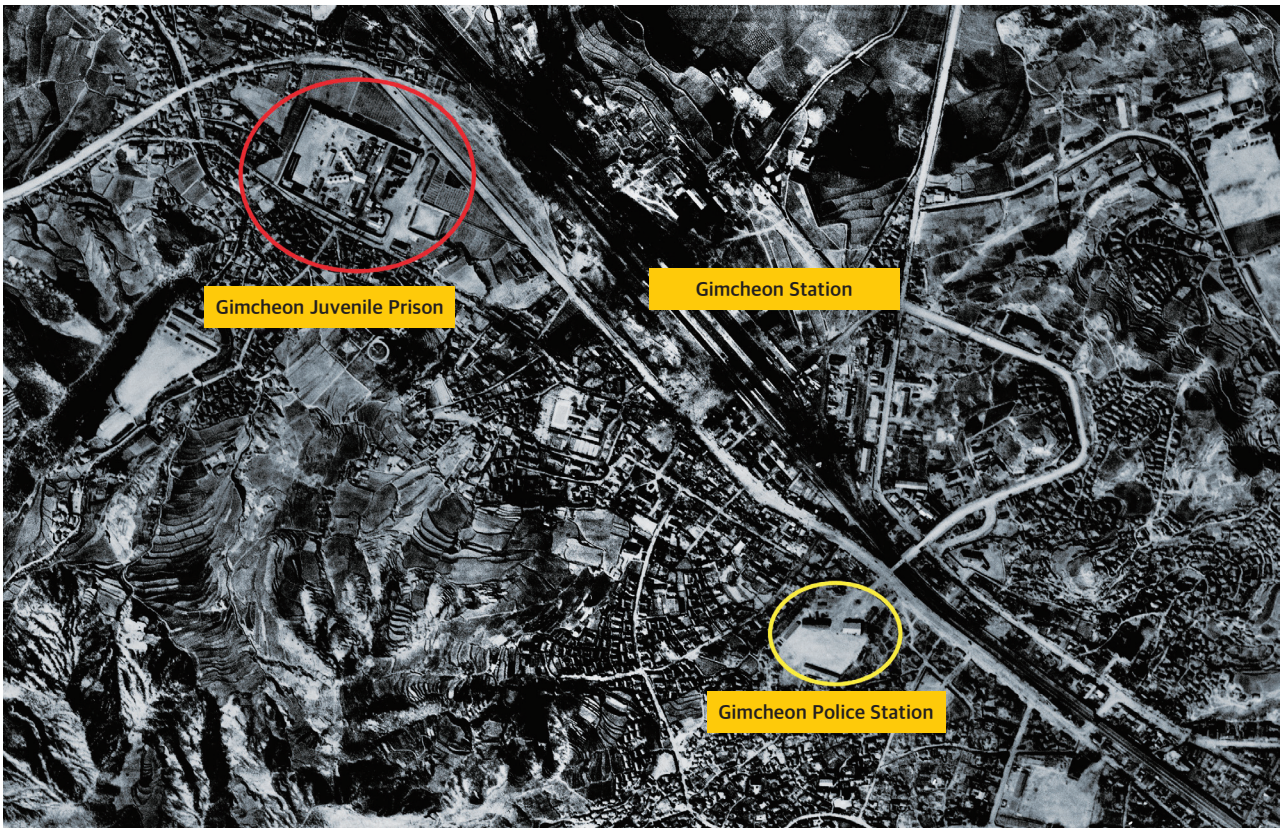
> The bereaved families in Gimcheon cannot sleep without taking pills or alcohol at night …
> There are still 1,200 bodies without proper graves still buried in those mountains.

"More than 1,200 National Guidance Alliance members were massacred during the Korean War." The prison guard's new shoes quickly became soaked with blood.

From July to August 1950, members of the National Guidance Alliance from the Gimcheon region in Gyeongsangbuk-do, many of whom were ordinary villagers, were rounded up and detained at Gimcheon Police Station and Gimcheon Juvenile Prison. More than 1,200 members of the National Guidance Alliance in Gimcheon and surrounding areas were arrested and detained by Gimcheon Police at this time. According to testimonies provided by police officers and prison guards at the time, all the National Guidance Alliance members and leftist prisoners were killed. Victims were loaded onto trucks and taken about 10 kilometers to Daebaengije and Dolgogae Hill in Guseong-myeon, Gimcheon. They were discarded in the mountains, along valleys, and in trenches bare of reddish soil, dug

by mobilized nearby villagers. One prison guard who worked at Gimcheon Juvenile Prison at the time (and a witness in the First Commission's investigation) describes the carnage that occurred.

On a random day in mid-July 1950, a truck escorted by PARK [NAME REDACTED], a prison guard at Gimcheon Juvenile Prison, left the prison's gate. In the truck's cargo area were about 20 members of the National Guidance Alliance and three or four prison guards. The truck stopped on a road crossing Dolgogae Hill in Songjuk-ri, Gimcheon. In the fields below, National Guidance Alliance members were tied in pairs and sitting closely together, under the watch of military police.
At the base of the mountain, several pits had been dug by local villagers under orders. Members of the National Guidance Alliance were seated in groups of four or five in front of the pits. Military police then fired their guns, and the prisoners collapsed into the pits with their hands still tied behind their backs. Soldiers ordered PARK to push remaining bodies into the pits with his foot. When PARK left Gimcheon Prison, he thought he was transporting the detainees to Daegu, so he wore fresh white sneakers. Those white sneakers quickly became soaked with blood and turned red.
The pits were about three meters long and as high as an adult's chest. Each pit held around ten to fifteen people. After the executions, nearby villagers, who had been waiting beyond the hill, came with shovels to cover the pits. That day, PARK witnessed the deaths of approximately 100 people. In the following days, the prison continued to transport members of the National Guidance Alliance to the massacre site for further killings.



Aerial photograph of Gimcheon Juvenile Prison in 1954. Members of the National Guidance Alliance from Gimcheon and Gumi were detained at Gimcheon Police Station and Gimcheon Juvenile Prison during July and August 1950, following the outbreak of the Korean War. @National Land Information Map

"Dig where the big tree stands."
Remains Finally Exhumed at the Dolgogae Massacre Site

Seventy-four years after the massacre, on August 14, 2024, a groundbreaking ceremony for the excavation of remains was held at Dolgogae. In 2003, remains were discovered at Dolgogae by a group of civilians. But this excavation marked the first official excavation conducted under the supervision of the TRCK. KANG Yeong-gu, head of the Gimcheon Bereaved Families Association, stated that he was not aware of the 2003 excavation at the time. How, then, did the excavation team know where to look for the bodies this time? "We heard that a family member of one of the victims had planted a zelkova tree at the site. So, we searched Dolgogae for large, thick trees. And sure enough, we found bodies beneath the tree."

Indeed, at the Dolgogae massacre site, unusually large and thick zelkova trees stand scattered throughout the area. According to the excavation team (Samhan Institute of Cultural Heritage), remains were found near these trees, and some of them were exhumed during this excavation. "This summer was incredibly hot, and the mosquitoes were relentless. The excavation team endured a lot. They combed through the area thoroughly, starting from the base of the valley, just in case any remains had been washed down by water." However, the remains at Dolgogae have not been fully recovered. Bodies still remain buried beneath trees marked as "burial sites." The excavation of another massacre site at Daebaengije has yet to even begin.

KANG Yeong-gu and the bereaved families of Gimcheon earnestly hope that all the remains will be recovered as soon as possible. Some wounds never truly heal, and stopping the bleeding alone can take a lifetime. When the shovels remove the topsoil from the graves, old wounds seem to reopen. Just when they think the bleeding has finally stopped and they remove their hands from their hearts, fresh red blood emerges like scarlet flowers. Until all the bodies are recovered, the families fear that their loved ones are left neglected underground, tangled and abandoned, as they were at the time of their death, never properly laid to rest.



The old Gimcheon Police Station building, located in Namsan-dong where the incident occurred. Gimcheon Police Station was relocated to Gimcheon Innovation City in 2020.

Day of the First Proper Burial
"Our wish is to have a small memorial built."

KANG Yeong-gu, head of the Bereaved Families Association, was subjected to guilt-by-association persecutions and grew up believing that he needed to be strong in order to survive. He practiced taekwondo and, after joining the military, was recognized for his skills and assigned as a taekwondo instructor during the Vietnam War. As president of the Gimcheon Vietnam War Veterans Association, KANG played a pivotal role in establishing the Gimcheon Vietnam War Memorial in 2006. However, he expressed regret that, despite the massacre of over 1,200 people in Gimcheon, not even a small tombstone for the victims has been built. "There are still people who look at anything related to the

National Guidance Alliance with prejudice. That stigma has yet to be removed in Gimcheon," he said. KANG stressed that the surviving family members don't have much time left and hoped the city of Gimcheon and the local community would show greater interest and support.

Starting from July 2024, the TRCK carried out exhumations at three locations: Songjuk-ri in Gimcheon, Nangwol-dong in Daejeon, and Jindeok-ri in Yeonggwang. On November 28, the remains recovered from these sites were interred together at the Sejong Memorial House. For the first time, the remains recovered from Dolgogae, Gimcheon were also laid to rest that day. From the morning of the funeral ceremony, the weather was overcast with dark clouds, showering rain and snow. During his remarks, KANG made an emotional plea, earnestly requesting that the recovery of all remains be completed.

"Every night bereaved family members in Gimcheon take pills or drink alcohol just to fall asleep at night. 'Chairman, please tell the Truth Commission that the exhumation remains unfinished. All they've done is disturb the ground without seeing it through,' they say to me. I've stood my ground as head of the Bereaved Families Association. Now that I'm 80, I've decided to step down and take my place as an ordinary member. If you ever have the opportunity to pass through Gimcheon, please make it a point to visit Dolgogae and Daebaengijae. There are still 1,200 bodies without proper graves still buried in those mountains."

After the ceremony, applications for DNA testing were received on one side. Elderly bereaved family members, their hands stiffened by the cold, carefully wrote the names of their deceased fathers on the forms. In the little time they have left, like the fleeting rays of late afternoon sunlight, one can only wonder if this waiting is a flicker of hope — or yet another pain to bear. Under the widespread branches of the zelkova tree that shields the ground at Dolgogae, lies the truth, still buried in that land.



A marker is placed on a zelkova tree at the Dolgogae site to indicate an unexcavated burial site.



Excavated and exposed human remains. @Samhan Institute of Cultural Heritage



KANG Yeong-gu, head of the Gimcheon Bereaved Families Association, carries victim remains.

TRCK Hosts “International Forum for Sharing the Results of Uncovering the Truth in History”

On November 7, 2024, the TRCK held the “International Forum for Sharing the Results of Uncovering the Truth in History,” at the Koreana Hotel in Jung-gu, Seoul. This forum examined post-World War II truth and reconciliation efforts around the world, as well as discussed future challenges.

South Korea, which launched its First and Second Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, is recognized as a nation actively reevaluating its historical past and striving for victim redress at the national level. The TRCK has worked to establish the truth for various cases, including civilian massacres around the time of the Korean War, human rights violations under authoritarian regimes, and abuse at group facilities, and during overseas adoption processes. Over 60 attendees, including domestic and international experts on historical issues, academic scholars, and local government officials responsible for the settlement of past affairs, were present at the forum.

In the first session, Dr. Marek Handerek presented an in-depth discussion on Poland's efforts to address its historical past, focusing on the role and functions of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). This was followed by a presentation by former Konkuk University Chair Professor SHIN Bok-ryong, who explained South Korea's process of addressing pro-Japanese collaborators during the Japanese colonial period and discussed the challenges of properly reconciling the legacy of colonial rule.

The second session featured Dr. Uladzislau Belavusau, a senior researcher in European Law at the T.M.C. Asser Institute in The Hague, who discussed the process of addressing historical injustices through Europe's Memory Laws. He highlighted how these laws have evolved amidst the competing efforts of various international groups to either preserve or deny historical memories.

Ukrainian journalist Nataliya Gumenyuk participated as a special speaker, delivering a vivid account of the atrocities of the Russia-Ukraine War, including civilian torture, child abductions, and human rights abuses, based on survivors' testimonies. She highlighted the efforts of the “Reckoning Project,” aimed at documenting and prosecuting war crimes committed by Russian forces, capturing the audience's attention.



Commissioner HUR Sang-soo of the TRCK speaks during the panel discussion of the "International Forum for Sharing the Results of Uncovering the Truth in History," held on November 7, 2024, at the Koreana Hotel in Jung-gu, Seoul.

In the subsequent panel discussion, the efforts of European nations in achieving exemplary resolutions to historical injustices through extensive debates and intense legal battles was highlighted, resonating strongly with the audience. Commissioner HUR Sang-soo of the TRCK was among the panelists. He discussed Europe’s victim relief policies and stressed the need for South Korea to explore proactive victim relief measures through legislative reforms.

2024 First Half Investigation Report Submitted to the President and National Assembly

The TRCK has published its *2024 First Half Investigation Report* **<photo>** and submitted it to the President and the National Assembly. This Report, which is the seventh released by the Commission, includes results of its truth-seeking activities and investigations from January to June 2024. The Report is divided into two parts: a general summary of the Commission's key activities (Volume 1) and the full text of case decisions (Volumes 2–20).



The TRCK submits a report to the President and the National Assembly twice a year — once for the first half and once for the second half, in accordance with the *Framework Act*. At the conclusion of its activities, the Commission will also publish a *Final Comprehensive Report*. The investigation report is available for download as a PDF on the Commission's official website (www.jinsil.go.kr, under Truth-Seeking Activities → Investigation Reports → Second Commission).

8th Municipal and Provincial Working-Level Council Meeting Discusses Cooperation on Compensation Law

On November 7, 2024, the TRCK held the "8th Municipal and Provincial Working-Level Council Meeting" **<photo>** at the Koreana Hotel in Jung-gu, Seoul. Key agenda items included discussions on cooperative strategies for passing the proposed amendments to the *Framework Act* related to compensation and reparations, which were submitted to the 22nd National Assembly. The implementation of recommendations by local governments regarding cases where the Commission had established the truth was also discussed. Additionally, the TRCK provided an update on the exhumation status of civilian victims killed around the time of the Korean War and urged local governments to complete ongoing excavation projects within the year.

"Collaboration and solidarity between the Commission and local governments are more critical than ever to support truth-seeking efforts and to advance the compensation and reparation legislation proposed to the 22nd National Assembly," said SONG Sang-kyo, Secretary-General of the TRCK, who presided over the meeting.

