

Truth and Reconciliation

2025 Summer Vol. 18



Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
Republic of Korea



An aerial photograph of Imjado Island during sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. The island features a large, rectangular salt field in the foreground, with various smaller fields and patches of greenery. A cable-stayed bridge extends from the island towards the right. The sea is visible in the background, with some distant islands and a small boat on the water.

The Korean War lands on the Island

Imjado Island, Sinan-gun, Jeollanam-do

A place where tulips bloom in waves every spring,
and pure salt is born from the sun-drenched sea.

Unspoken wounds cut deep on this beautiful island.

Innocent civilians were indiscriminately massacred by hostile forces, and more were killed during the bloody retaliation of right-wing groups. Over 1,600 victims lost their lives here, amidst the chaos of the Korean War.

For being Christian, for being young, for simply being wealthy...

At the Jinri Pier, in the fields of Baeksan ...

They were taken to the sea and drowned, buried without names in sandy pits.

At Baeksan Fields stands a martyrdom memorial. Engraved is the word "Forgive."

This word echoes a pain that cannot be erased, a deep sorrow that remains unresolved. As the sun falls into the West Sea, it leaves Imjado in shades of red.

Written and Photographed by KIM Kyung-bin

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Cover Story

Gochang, Jeollabuk-do, where the drama *“When Life Gives You Tangerines”* was filmed, is a place of breathtaking beauty. As captivating as the fields of young barley may be, this was once the site of civilian massacres during the Korean War.

At Seonsan Village in Seondong-ri, Gongseum-myeon, Gochang-gun stands a Memorial Tower for Civilian Victims of the Korean War. Here, the cries and screams of those who were hunted like rabbits, bound together with straw ropes, and slaughtered in a tangled heap can be heard. Echoes of the Korean War call again.

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Press Briefing to Mark the End of the Second Term Truth Commission's Investigation Period

Healing the Scars of War and Uncovering Hidden Truths

“

18,808 cases processed — 90% of total 20,924 cases
2,116 cases suspended ... Truth established for *ex-officio* investigations,
civilian killings, group detention facilities, and overseas adoptions.

”



At a press briefing marking the end of its investigation period, the TRCK announced the progress it has achieved with case applications over the four years since the start of its first investigation on May 27, 2021.



TRCK urges the enactment of legislation that aligns with international standards.
Three years of exhumation efforts at 21 excavation sites nationwide result in the identification of 11 remains.



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (Chairperson PARK Sun-young, hereinafter “TRCK”) held a press briefing on May 26, 2025 to mark the end of the Second Term Truth Commission’s investigation period. The TRCK presented its progress on case applications, major accomplishments, and future tasks.

At the press briefing, the TRCK announced the status of case applications handled over the four years since the start of investigations on May 27, 2021. Out of a total of 20,924 cases assigned to the Investigation Bureau, approximately 90% (89.9%), or 18,808 cases, have been processed. Among these, the truth was established for 11,908 cases (including confirmed cases), while 2,116 cases were suspended during investigation. Although the TRCK extended its investigation period by one year in accordance with the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*, there was still an absolute lack of time to process the remaining cases.

Ex-officio investigations into cases of “Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan,” “Civilian Killings in Shinan-gun,” and “Killings of Religious Figures.”

On this day, the TRCK presented its major accomplishments. Among its most notable achievements was the launching of *ex-officio* investigations into historically significant and diverse types of incidents. Through its *ex-officio* investigation of *The Participation of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan in the Korean War*, the TRCK confirmed that more individuals had taken part in the war than the previously known figure of 642. In the case of *Civilian Killings in Shinan-gun, Jeollanam-do*, where both left- and right-wing groups suffered casualties during the Korean War, the TRCK established the truth behind the deaths of 206 additional individuals, which contributed to easing local tensions and restoring community relations. In the case of *Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces Around the Time of the Korean War*, the

The Journey of the Second Term Truth and Reconciliation Commission



**December 10
2020**

Launch of the Second Term Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Commencement of Applications for Truth-Finding Investigations

**May 27
2021**

Launch of First Round of Investigations
Total of 328 cases including *Human Rights Violations at Brothers Home*

**December 7
2021**

First Decision of Truths Established (Korean Independence Movements Against Imperial Japan)
LEE Jae-sil's Student Movement at Mokpo Commercial High School and *KIM Eon-bae's Fundraising Campaign for Daehan Shinmindan Military Funds*



**January 21
2022**

Enforcement of the *Act on Restoring the Honor of Participants of the March 15th Democracy Movement*
Opening of the Changwon Office



**May 24
2022**

First Truth Established for Cases Related to Civilian Killings Around the Time of the Korean War
Civilian Killings by the Military and Police in Jindo, Jeollanam-do (1)



**February 11
2023**

First Truth Established for *Ex-officio* Investigations
Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea

TRCK established the truth for 533 Protestants, 64 Catholics, and 3 *Daejonggyo* believers. The TRCK's *ex-officio* investigation into this case was the first nationwide large-scale documentation of religious figures killed by hostile forces during either the first or second term of the TRCK. Other major accomplishments included the collection of records related to civilian massacres during the Korean War by conducting on-site investigations.

Court rules in favor of victims of group detention facilities such as Brothers Home

Cases of major human rights violations in South Korea's modern history also drew significant public attention. The case of *Human Rights Violations at Brothers Home* — the first case officially filed with the 2nd Term TRCK — garnered widespread media coverage and public interest.

Through its investigations into this case, the TRCK established the truth for 477 case



applications (involving 643 people) among a total of 604 applications (involving 739 people). From July 20, 1960 to August 20, 1992, state authorities including the police, forcibly detained individuals labeled as vagrants at the Brothers Home, a facility operated by a private social welfare foundation. Investigators confirmed that during their time in the facility, detainees had their human rights severely violated. They were subjected to forced labor, beatings, ill-treatment, death, and

disappearances. Among the victims, 46 whose truths were established by the TRCK went on to file lawsuits against the state and, as of May, won compensation rulings from the Supreme Court in two separate judgments.

The TRCK brought public attention to major child rights abuse cases as well. These included the *Human Rights Violations of Children at Seongam Academy*, as well as *ex-officio* investigations into *Human Rights Violations at Yeonghwasuk and*

Jaesaengwon and *Human Rights Violations at Deokseongwon*. In response to investigations, local governments such as Gyeonggi-do and Busan Metropolitan City have implemented ordinances to provide victims with livelihood support and medical assistance.

In particular, on March 18, 2025, the TRCK, during its 101st meeting, decided to revise its recommendations regarding civilian massacres committed by both hostile forces and military/police during the Korean War, aligning them with international standards. The TRCK urged the government to establish legislation in line with international human rights and humanitarian law such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *1949 Geneva Conventions on the protection of civilians during wartime*, and the *2005 UN General Assembly-adopted Basic Principles and Guidelines*, to ensure that victims receive remedies and compensation. The TRCK specifically recommended that the State (National Assembly) urgently enact legislation to ensure that victims and bereaved families of civilian massacres around the time of the Korean War — regardless of the perpetrating party — receive effective and comprehensive remedies, including compensation and reparations. It also urged the enactment of a law that would exempt such victims' rights to seek damages from the statute of limitations.



Exhumation and DNA testing yields results... Family reunites in more than 70 years.

Another key achievement of the TRCK during its second term was the exhumation of remains of civilian victims from around the time of the Korean War and the identification of 11 bodies among the recovered remains. In 2022, the TRCK selected 37 priority excavation sites out of 381 locations nationwide and conducted excavations by region each year. As a result, over the three-year period from 2022 to 2024, excavations at 21 sites across the country yielded 274 sets of human remains, 207 teeth, and 1,720 items of personal belongings.

The discovery of remains at the site of *Human Rights Violations of Children at Seongam Academy*, located at Seongam-dong, Ansan, Gyeonggi-do, served as material evidence in the



The press briefing held by the TRCK on May 26, 2025 to mark the end of its investigation period drew strong media interest, with around 40 reporters from 20 media outlets in attendance.

case. This enabled Gyeonggi-do to complete a broader excavation of the mass graves of child victims spread throughout the Seongam-dong area.

In another case, through forensic analysis of remains, a victim was identified and reunited with family members in more than 70 years. After remains were exhumed at the site of civilian killings by hostile forces in Yeonggwang, Jeollanam-do, forensic analysis identified a man named KIM [NAME REDACTED], born in 1921, who was 29 years old at the time of death and the father of a young daughter; DNA testing confirmed his identity and he was finally reunited with his now 78-year-old daughter;

Investigation period must be extended to complete suspended cases;

Recommendations must be carried out by enacting a law for compensation and reparation.

At this press briefing held ahead of the closing of its investigation period and conclusion of its term on November 26, the TRCK advocated for an extension of the investigation period to address unresolved cases and urged the enactment of a compensation law to implement its recommendations. Despite the achievements of the TRCK, the remaining tasks are urgent and desperate. With the investigation period now coming to an end, 2,116 cases have been suspended, leaving their truths unresolved. The only realistic option now to continue investigation is to extend the investigation period by amending the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth*

and Reconciliation.

During the press briefing, the need to revise the *Framework Act* to include provisions on compensation and reparation — currently pending in the National Assembly’s Public Administration and Security Committee — was also reiterated. The TRCK explained that after their truths are established, applicants and bereaved families must bear the burden of filing individual lawsuits if they wish to seek compensation. In this process, court rulings can be inconsistent, the state is free from liability for harm caused by hostile forces or foreign troops, and remedies are limited due to statutes of limitations expiring. Therefore, to achieve equitable and effective remedy, laws must be enacted or amended to include measures for compensation and reparation.

Another proposed post-Commission task is the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Foundation to systematically archive and commemorate the TRCK’s findings. The need for institutional support to continue exhumation efforts and identification of remains, which help uncover the truth and ease the suffering of bereaved families, was also highlighted as a remaining challenge.

The TRCK was reestablished as an independent national investigative body on December 10, 2020, under the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*, ten

years after the end of its first term. The first and second chairs, JUNG Keun-sik and KIM Gwang-dong, each served two-year terms, followed by the current chair, PARK Sun-young, who assumed office on December 10, 2024. The TRCK deliberated its first case at its first meeting on March 25, 2021 and had its final case deliberation during its 110th meeting on May 20, 2025. Over the years, the TRCK held 23 meetings in 2021, 26 in 2022, 20 in 2023, 24 in 2024, and 17 in 2025 — averaging about twice per month, or 22 sessions per year. The investigation period of the TRCK was set at three years, but it was extended for one year in accordance with the law until May 26, 2025. The TRCK’s activities will officially end within the next six months, following the completion of its *Final Report*.

“Compared to the first term, the second term Truth and Reconciliation Commission has addressed more mass civilian killings from the Korean War period and uncovered the truth behind major human rights violations that had long been concealed in modern Korean history,” said Chairperson PARK Sun-young. “However, the suspended cases must still be investigated, and for our recommendations to be carried out properly, the new government and the National Assembly must take active steps to amend the *Framework Act* and enact a law for compensation and reparation.” 

Reward Granted

Association of Korean Student Volunteer Soldiers in Japan Forensic pathologist in the case of the *Suspicious Death of LEE Yoon-sung* Suryu Catholic Church in Gimje, Jeollabuk-do

The TRCK granted rewards to individuals and organizations that significantly contributed to establishing the truth in several key investigations. These include the Association of Korean Student Volunteer Soldiers in Japan, which provided important evidence in the investigation of *The Participation of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan in the Korean War*; forensic pathologist PARK [NAME REDACTED] who conducted the autopsy in the *Suspicious Death of LEE Yoon-sung*; and the Suryu Catholic Church in Gimje, Jeollabuk-do, which actively cooperated in the TRCK's *ex-officio* investigation of *Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces Around the Time of the Korean War*.

At its 111th meeting on June 10, 2025, the TRCK reviewed and approved compensation payments under Article 30(6) of the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*. Each party was awarded KRW 5



Total reward of KRW 15 million granted to contributors recognized for helping to establish the truth.

“Continue the journey with us to correct historical wrongs and restore justice.”



million for their contributions.

The Association of Korean Student Volunteer Soldiers in Japan (Chairperson PARK Woon-wook) provided previously unpublished materials from the 1992 manuscript, *The History of the Student Volunteer Force of Koreans in Japan*. This manuscript included a list of members who participated in the Korean War, as well as the military units to which 126 of them were assigned, allowing the TRCK to confirm the involvement of over 30 additional members.

Forensic pathologist provides key testimony in the “*Suspicious Death of LEE Yoon-sung*.”

Forensic pathologist PARK [NAME REDACTED] provided key testimony in the case of *Suspicious Death of LEE Yoon-sung* that helped clarify the truth. His testimony confirmed the existence of a last will and testament and demonstrated attempts by the military to conceal the incident.

Suryu Catholic Church in Gimje (led by Father Peter KIM Dae-young) was acknowledged for its significant contributions to the investigation into the *Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces Around the Time of the Korean War*. The church provided valuable materials such as family registers, genealogical records of the victims, and rare

publications like *The Stream of Faith*, which is difficult to obtain commercially. It also encouraged and facilitated testimony from bereaved families and witnesses.

On June 18, 2025, Chairperson PARK Sun-young of the TRCK extended her gratitude as she presented the official reward certificate to PARK Woon-wook, president of the Association of Korean Student Volunteer Soldiers in Japan, during a ceremony at the Korea Press Center. “Truth-finding was possible thanks to the dedication and cooperation of individuals who played a decisive role in uncovering the facts of these cases,” said PARK. “We ask for your continued interest and participation in the Commission’s efforts to correct historical wrongs and restore justice.” 🗨️



PARK Sun-young, Chairperson of the TRCK (right), is seen presenting the official reward certificate to PARK Woon-wook, President of the Association of Korean Student Volunteer Soldiers in Japan (second from left), at the Korea Press Center on June 18, 2025.

Ex-officio Investigation **Truth Established**

Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were

Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea

Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces

Around the Time of the Korean War



Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea

“Liberated. After 53 years.”
**We cried together as the repatriated
fisherman shared his story.**

HONG Soo-jung | Head of Investigation Division 8



Truth established for all victims identified through *ex-officio* investigations and 246 applications ... total of 1,288 victims identified.

Few historical cases provide such a clear estimate of the total number of victims. Short investigation period leaves regret over an “unfinished outcome.”



“Today, I am liberated. After 53 years, a heavy burden has finally been removed from my heart. Right now, I feel like I could fly”

These are the words of JANG Geun-chang, a crew member of the fishing vessel *Hyeopdong*, shortly after being acquitted in a retrial verdict delivered at the Gangneung Branch of the Chuncheon District Court on May 22, 2025.

On June 3, 1971, eleven crew members of FV *Hyeopdong* were abducted by North Korea while fishing for Pacific saury. They were detained in North Korea for about a year and returned through Sokcho Port on May 10, 1972.

The crew went through joint interrogation and was charged with violations of the *National Security Act* after undergoing investigations by the police and public prosecutor. Eventually they were sentenced to one year in prison for violating the *Anti-Communist Act* and the *Fisheries Act*.

**Beatings and torture ... one fisherman
inflicted self-harm during joint
interrogation.**

Only recently have people become aware of what “returned fishermen abducted by North Korea” means. This term refers to those who

were either abducted by North Korean patrol boats while fishing in the East or West Sea, or who accidentally strayed into North Korean waters due to poor visibility (such as fog) on their way back to port after finishing their work. They were typically held in North Korea from several days to a few years before returning to the South. Upon return, they were immediately subjected to joint interrogation by intelligence agencies such as the police or the military counterintelligence corps. Then, they were further investigated by the police and, in most cases, indicted for violations of the *Fisheries Act* and the *Anti-Communist Act*, receiving fines or prison sentences. Some, while being detained illegally for extended periods, were subjected to beatings, torture, and other ill-

treatment. In one particularly disturbing case, a crew member of FV *Hyeopdong*, self-harmed himself during the joint interrogation process. In response, the military security unit issued an order to curb excessive torture. Considering how uncommon it is for investigative agencies to create official documents addressing ill-treatment, the existence of this report provides a grim indication of how extreme the torture endured by the fishermen must have been.

When abducted fishermen cases were first assigned to Division 8 of the Second Investigation Bureau in 2021, there were only three applications. However, since the application period was still open and the issue was deemed a priority, a comprehensive investigation was

JANG Geun-chang, a crew member of the fishing vessel *Hyeopdong* who had been abducted and later repatriated by North Korea, shows his complicated feelings after sharing his story during a meeting held by the TRCK (left). On May 22, 2025 he was acquitted by the court in a retrial, 53 years after his original conviction.



Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea

Overview of Truths Established

Repatriated Fishermen

233 *ex-officio*
investigations and
case applications

1,245 victims

Families of Returned Fishermen

1 case application

2 victims

Cases of Subsequent Criminal Prosecution

9 case applications

37 victims

Families of Non-Returned Fishermen

4 case applications

4 victims

Fishing Vessel *5th Masan*

launched, including the collection of related materials. On February 8, 2022, the TRCK ruled on its first case related to human rights violations, which was the case of abducted crew members of FV *Geonseol* and *Pungseong*. By this time, the number of applications related to abducted fishermen had increased to about 50 cases. The cases were grouped together based on the return date of the fishermen and reported to the Commission.

The Commission decided to launch an *ex-officio* investigation of 109 vessels (with an estimated 982 crew members) that returned on the same date. This was the first *ex-officio* investigation launched by the TRCK.

With the truth established for crew members of FV *Geonseol* and the decision to launch an *ex-officio* investigation into this matter, applications increased significantly.

A breakdown of applications shows: 232 cases involved illegal investigation and surveillance, 9 cases involved retrospective criminal punishment years after return, 1 case involved human rights violations against family members of a fisherman who returned, 4 cases involved human rights violations against family members of fishermen who never returned, and 4 cases were not applicable. In total 250 applications were submitted for truth-seeking. Based on extensive evidence, the investigation

team decided to conduct *ex-officio* investigations for all vessels and crew members that shared the same return date, and for general applications, findings were reported by vessel. Even if an application was not made, the TRCK determined that the truth was established for all crew members involved in the same case. As a result, the investigation committee decided that the truth was established for all victims identified in the *ex-officio* investigations and the 246 application cases. In total, 1,288 victims were identified and had their truths established.

Why was it difficult for the crew member of FV *Manbok* to file for a retrial?

The investigation into human rights violations against the abducted and returned fishermen was fundamentally based on materials obtained from relevant agencies such as the National Archives, the National Police Agency, the Defense Counterintelligence Command, the National Intelligence Service, and the respective district prosecutors' offices. With the launch of *ex-officio* investigations, which broadened the scale of the probe, the most difficult task became verifying the personal information of crew members. Names, birthdates, and addresses were different on each document, and even when identities were confirmed, it was often impossible to determine whether the person was still alive or to locate their current address or

family members.

KIM Soo-seong, a crew member of the FV *Manbok*, was abducted in 1968 and returned to South Korea, only to be sentenced to one year in prison for violating the *Anti-Communist Act*. After the TRCK established his truth, KIM sought a retrial and requested a copy of his sentencing document from the National Archives. However, his request was denied because the court records listed his name as "KIM Dal-seong" not "KIM Soo-seong." His birth record — which for some reason was registered late — listed his name as KIM Soo-seong, and so there was no way for him to prove that he in fact was crew member KIM Dal-seong of the FV *Manbok*. Fortunately, the TRCK had collected numerous documents confirming that KIM Dal-seong, crew member of FV *Manbok*, was the same person as KIM Soo-seong, during its investigations, KIM was able to file for a retrial in court only after obtaining the original court ruling from the TRCK through a formal information disclosure request.

Progress made in confirming fabricated spy cases despite difficulties in identity verification.

Investigation and intelligence agencies viewed the abducted and returned fishermen as "potential national security threats" (i.e., individuals that may commit espionage) and, for decades after their return, monitored



The crew members of the fishing vessel *5th Masan* were subjected to illegal detention and investigation by authorities immediately upon their return, and were placed under long-term surveillance. On May 13, 2025, their truths were established by the TRCK at its 109th meeting.



The crew members of fishing vessel *5th Masan* cheer with joy upon their return.

their movements by deploying surveillance networks involving neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Some were eventually prosecuted under espionage-related charges. The TRCK during its first term reviewed over 20 such cases and established the truth for 7 cases through *ex-officio* investigations. The second term TRCK also established the truth for 6 similar cases that came in as applications.

These included incidents from 1969, where the Defense Security Command and Jeonnam Provincial Police Headquarters labeled a large group of fishermen abducted from the East and West Sea — along with their families, coworkers, and neighbors — as part of a massive spy ring (e.g., *Human Rights Violations based on the National Security Act of Abducted and Repatriated Fisherman JANG [NAME REDACTED]*, *Human Rights Violations based on the National Security Act of Abducted and Repatriated Fishermen in the East Sea*). Many of these cases involved fabricated espionage charges by the police and military intelligence agencies as part of political maneuvering.

Not only the fishermen themselves, but also their families — including those of fishermen who never returned — were victims of long-term surveillance and monitoring. The TRCK investigated and established the truth for such cases involving human rights violations of family members. The truth was established for one

case involving a family member of a returned fisherman, and four cases related to family members of fishermen who never returned.

As of May 2025, approximately 250 fishermen — including JANG Geun-chang of the FV *Hyeopdong* — have filed for retrials and have been acquitted after having their truths established by the TRCK. Following the TRCK's *ex-officio* investigation launched in February 2023 and subsequent vindication of 150 fishermen who returned in 23 vessels on May 28, 1969, the public prosecutors' office announced in May that it would request a motion to open large-scale retrials for these wrongful convictions. Last year, prosecutors announced that they would pursue *ex-officio* retrials for cases involving abducted and repatriated fishermen. And more recently, specific plans for a retrial involving 30 crew members who returned in 1972 was announced. Although some victims have already filed for retrials individually, the prosecution's initiative to pursue *ex-officio* retrials marks a significant first step toward redressing this injustice.

Some local governments, including Gangwon-do, have enacted ordinances to support victims. Most of these new laws aim to assist truth-finding, restoration of damages, and improving public opinion of these victims. However, what the victims need most at present is legal support for restitution, which is where local governments

may be able to extend concrete assistance.

According to the *Status of Abducted and Repatriated Vessels and Fishermen* compiled by the National Police Headquarters in 1987, a total of 459 fishing vessels and 3,648 fishermen were abducted between 1954 to 1987, of which 33 vessels and 418 fishermen never returned. The TRCK has completed investigations on approximately one-third of the total cases related to abducted and repatriated fishermen. Although these human rights violations occurred over several decades — from the 1950s through the 1980s — few historical cases provide such a clear estimate of the total number of victims as the case of the abducted fishermen. Based on the TRCK's current investigative capacity and the wealth of materials collected so far, it is believed that a full investigation of all victims could be possible, provided the investigation period is extended.

Although victims have finally received truth-finding decisions from the TRCK decades after the incidents occurred, they must still seek retrials and state compensation on their own, knocking on the court's doors yet again. The burden of pursuing redress rests entirely on the victims themselves. Therefore, to help victims, a special law needs to be enacted to ensure that victims receive systematic support throughout the entire process, from thorough investigation and truth-finding to retrial and compensation. 

Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces Around the Time of the Korean War

The Day Churches and Cathedrals Burned The Brutal Truth We Never Knew



Father Anthony Collier, the first parish priest of Soyangro Catholic Church, was taken by North Korean forces on June 27, 1950, and killed. The church described him as “the first martyr of the Korean War.”

In January 1952, at the height of the Korean War, CHOI Kyung-sook and six members of her family, who were parishioners of Shintaein Catholic Church in Jeongeup, Jeollabuk-do, were brutally killed by partisan guerrillas for sheltering a priest. The family was taken into the mountains where they were slaughtered with bamboo spears, pitchforks, and stones. Among them were infants and children aged one, five, and seven.

On April 15, 2025, during its 105th meeting, the TRCK determined that the truth was established

66

During the Korean War, local leftists and other hostile forces drowned church members alive at sea while bound to stones, sparing neither children nor the elderly ...

Truth is established for 600 religious figures.

99

for Christians and *Daejonggyo* clergy in Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Gangwon areas who were killed by hostile forces. With this decision, the TRCK officially concluded its *ex-officio* investigation into the *Killings of Religious Figures by Hostile Forces around the Time of the Korean War*. The scope of the *ex-officio* investigation was initially planned to cover victims from all religions killed around the time of the Korean War, but cases involving Buddhist and Confucian victims were difficult to investigate due to lack of existing records.

Truth is established for 533 Protestants and 64 Catholics.

Through its *ex-officio* investigation, the TRCK examined a list of civilian casualties during the Korean War and cross-checked it with religious records, allowing the truth to be established for a total of 600 religious figures — 533 Protestants, 64 Catholics, and 3 members of the *Daejonggyo* faith. Roughly 300 religious figures (mostly Christians, also some Buddhists, Confucians, and *Cheondogyo* believers) who had submitted applications during the first and second terms of the TRCK also had their truths established.

During the Korean War, religious figures — particularly Protestants and Catholics — were often targeted by hostile forces due to their identities as religious believers, national leaders,

intellectuals, local elites, or right-wing figures. Most of these incidents occurred during the retreat of the North Korean People's Army. The region with the highest number of victims was Jeolla-do, where 337 Protestants and Catholics had their truths established.

Yeomsan Church in Yeonggwang, Jeollanam-do, recorded the highest number of victims from a single congregation. During the South Korean military's recapture of the area in late September 1950, the church held a celebration welcoming the troops. For this reason, 77 of its members — two-thirds of the entire congregation, including children and the elderly — were killed over a four-month period by local leftist groups, either individually or with their families. Most were tied with rope and weighed down with stones before being thrown alive into the sea near the sluice gate at Seoldo Port in Bongnam-ri, Yeomsan-myeon. Among them, 54 victims had their truths established based on records and witness testimonies.

At Mangyeong Church in Gimje, Jeollabuk-do, young members who had formed an anti-communist revolution group were killed at Jeonju Prison. Other church members were taken and executed at the well of Mangyeong police substation by local leftists. In total, 15 people were killed and among them, nine had their truths established based on records and witness testimonies. The pastor and members of



Soyangro Catholic Church in Chuncheon, Gangwon-do, has been designated as a “Cathedral of Noble Sacrifice.”



Yeomsan Church in Yeonggwang, Jeollanam-do, suffered the highest number of victims among individual churches, with 77 people killed.



On April 17, 2025, Chairperson PARK Sun-young of the TRCK meets with bereaved family members of the victims killed by hostile forces during the Korean War at Suryu Catholic Church in Gimje, Jeollabuk-do.

Mangyeong Church were taken to Mangyeong police substation, and executed on September 27, 1950 at the well of the police substation. Victims were placed in the well and held down with heavy stones. Around 50 people were killed at Mangyeong police substation, including many Christians.

At Suryu Catholic Church in Gimje, Jeollabuk-do, 13 church members were killed by partisan guerrillas between October 1950 and January 1951. Among them, seven had their truths established based on a review of records.

In Chungcheong-do, 125 Protestants and 20 Catholics had their truths established. In Gyeongsang-do, 12 Protestants had their truths established. In Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Gangwon regions, 92 Protestants, 11 Catholics, and 3 members of the *Daejonggyo* faith had their truths established. Of these, 82 were victims of abduction to North Korea. The three *Daejonggyo* victims — MYEONG Je-se, AHN Jae-hong, and JEONG In-bo — were all figures who had devoted themselves to independence and nationalist movements during the Japanese colonial period and had been awarded the Order of Merit for National Foundation.

The TRCK recommended that the government enact legislation to restore victims’ rights, demand an official apology from North Korea, and support memorial projects for the victims. 

An Era of Hatred, a Massacre of Madness

The Day Seoul National University Hospital Became Hell

Massacre at Seoul National University
Hospital by the North Korean People's Army



The Memorial Tower for the Unknown Warrior of Freedom. This memorial was established by The Korea Times in 1963 on a low hill near the mortuary of Seoul National University Hospital. It was placed here to honor the wounded South Korean soldiers and civilian patients who were killed by North Korean forces during the Korean War.



North Korean soldiers massacre wounded soldiers and civilian patients.

“Inhumane atrocities, clear war crimes.”

“Truth Established” for roughly 330 identified victims.



On April 8, 2025, during its 104th meeting, the TRCK determined that the truth was established for the *Massacre at Seoul National University Hospital by the North Korean People’s Army*. The investigation was based on a comprehensive examination of documents including statements from doctors, nurses, and nursing students of the Seoul National University Hospital, as well as captured North Korean soldiers recorded in the *Korean War Crimes Investigation Report* (KWC #36, June 13, 1953) by the U.S. Far East Command. Statements from the applicant and witnesses, expert interviews, and a review of related historical records were also conducted to reach the conclusion,

Public execution, “Indiscriminate Killings” by grenade.

The applicant stated that he filed the truth-seeking application, “to honor the wounded South Korean soldiers and civilian patients who were helplessly killed in their hospital beds by North Korean forces during the Korean War.” He wished to “console the bereaved families by

bringing out the truth.” The TRCK decided that this case constituted “killings by hostile forces against the Republic of Korea.”

This case was first investigated by the Korean War Crimes Division of the U.S. Far East Command during the Korean War by interrogating captured North Korean Soldiers at the Geogje POW Camp. The testimonies of doctors, nurses, and nursing students of the Seoul National University Hospital, as well as those of captured North Korean soldiers, who were identified as perpetrators, were recorded in the *Korean War Crimes Investigation Report* (KWC #36, June 13, 1953). The TRCK reviewed the statements in this report, and conducted its own interviews with the applicant, witnesses, and experts, as well as examined historical records to investigate this matter. The TRCK estimated the number of hospitalized at the time — including wounded soldiers and civilians — to be around 1,000, and among them, about 330 were identified through the investigation. The perpetrators included about 50 North Korean soldiers and nine local members of the Workers’ Party from

the Seongdong-gu District. Among them were Colonel LEE Im-cheol of the 4th Division of the North Korean People's Army, soldier GWAK Chan-gyu, and Company Commander LEE Gang-guk of the Munhwa-dong Provisional People's Committee.

On June 28, 1950, just days after the outbreak of the war, North Korean forces went room to room in the hospital and executed approximately 150 people with rifles and pistols. The next day, June 29, they took around 180 patients who could still walk to a hill behind the hospital and publicly executed them. The executions were particularly inhumane and brutally cruel as some patients were killed with grenades and then finished off with pistols. The bodies were left abandoned in the morgue, trash incinerator, near the hospital wards, or scattered in the hills behind the hospital.

Over 100 wounded soldiers at Severance Hospital were also publicly executed.

During its investigation, the TRCK also confirmed — based on document KWC #1183 — that around June 28, 1950, approximately 100 wounded South Korean soldiers were publicly executed by 19 members of the 5th Regiment, 4th Division of the North Korean People's Army at what is now Yonsei University Severance Hospital.

The TRCK, citing international human rights and humanitarian laws, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *1949 Geneva*

Conventions on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War, and *UN guidelines*, as well as the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*, recommended that a law be established to provide victims and their bereaved families with effective and sufficient remedies, including compensation, regardless of who the perpetrators were. Additionally it recommended to the state (National Assembly) that a law be made to exclude the application of statutes of limitations to claims for damages related to these incidents.

The TRCK further recommended that the government demand North Korea to issue an official apology, carry out excavations of presumed burial sites at Seoul National University Hospital, support victim recovery efforts and memorial projects, and reflect these accounts into historical records. Furthermore, the TRCK asked the government to organize ongoing security education based on themes of peace and human rights in public school curricula and lifelong learning programs adapted to each age group, to teach about the disasters of war and promote the value of peace and human rights. 📧



Summer of 1950, Armed Neighbors A Village Left in Ruins after a War of Retaliation

Civilian Killings by the Military and Police

“

85 dead in Asan, 60 dead in Wollim. Most victims were ordinary farmers. Women and children under the age of 10 were brutally killed in Wollim.

”

After 75 years, the truth came out about ordinary farmers in their 20s and 30s being indiscriminately killed by the military and police during counterinsurgency operations at the time of the Korean War. The TRCK recommended that the government issue an official apology, establish laws for compensation and exemption from the statutes of limitations, restore damages,

support memorial services, reflect the incident in historical records, and pursue peace and human rights education.

Police officer takes revenge on neighbors after family is killed by leftists.

On April 22, 2025, during its 107th meeting, the TRCK decided that the truth was established for the case of *Civilian Killings by Military and Police in Wollim Village, Gochang, Jeollabuk-do*. This case involves the killing of 60 villagers from Wollim-ri, Mujang-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeollabuk-do. On May 10, 1951, villagers were taken and killed in valleys near Simokdong and Bongamsan Mountain during a counterinsurgency operation carried out by the

police on accusations of collaborating with the enemy or because they were caught up in local family conflicts. The perpetrators were identified as the 3rd Company of the 18th Combat Police Battalion under the Jeonbuk Provincial Police Headquarters, commanded by KIM Yong-sik. KIM ordered the killings in retaliation for the deaths of his own family and relatives at the hands of local leftists. Among the victims, 30 (50%) were women, and 15 (25%) were children under the age of ten. In terms of occupation, 27 (45%) were farmers, the highest among all occupations.

The truth was established for *Civilian Killings by Military and Police in Gochang, Jeollabuk-do (6)* as well on this day. The TRCK confirmed that 16 villagers were killed during military and police search-and-destroy operations on suspicion of leftist activities at Hajeon-ri and Yonggi-ri in Simwon-myeon, Gunyu-ri and Seonsan Village in Gongeum-myeon, and Bidulgi Cave in Sangha-myeon. Among them 11 (68.8%) were farmers.

Additionally, the TRCK established the truth



“Memorial Tower for Civilian Victims of the Korean War” located in Seonsan Village, Seondong-ri, Gongeum-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeollabuk-do. @KIM Kyung-bin

of another mass civilian killing in Asan-gun, Chungcheongnam-do. Following the recapture of Seoul on September 28, 1950, 85 villagers accused of collaborating with the enemy during the occupation of the North Korean People’s Army were killed by police and security forces. Related to this incident, the TRCK determined that the truth was established for *Civilian Killings by Military and Police in Asan, Chungcheongnam-do (4)* and *Civilian Killings by Military and Police in Asan, Chungcheongnam-do (5)* at its 104th and 108th meetings, respectively. 



Beneath a Small Burial Mound Emerges a Mass Grave

Civilian Killings by Military and Police in Ugang-myeon,
Dangjin, Chungcheongnam-do

Story and photos by **KANG Byun-gu**

Author of *The Story of Peace Told by the Island*

“

“She could not reach her husband’s body.”

So, she collected bodies near the communication tower,
buried them, built a small burial mound,
and visited them every year.

For more than 70 years ... the widow grieved.

”

As I approached the Radio Monitoring Station in Songsan-ri, Ugang-myeon, Dangjin-si, Chungcheongnam-do, I saw antennas standing in a circular formation across the wide-open fields. The upright steel structures looked solemn, as if they were listening to a divine voice from heaven. As I passed through the main gate, a staff member stopped me, then redirected me to a path beside the gate. A short drive along a rose-covered fence led me to the exhumation site. Excavation started at this site on April 3rd after the groundbreaking ceremony. Due to the unexpectedly large number of remains uncovered, the exhumation period was extended. The project was briefly put on hold, but when I heard they were resuming work, I came to see the site.

Over 60 sets of remains discovered after the groundbreaking ceremony in April.

The excavation site wasn't very large, but it appeared quite deep. Remains uncovered in the previous phase had been recovered, and the second phase of excavation was now underway in a deepened pit. From the floor and walls of the pit, skulls, leg bones, and other remains could be seen. CHO Young-seon, the excavation team leader at THEHANN Research Institute of Cultural Heritage said that the number of remains uncovered so far was "60 plus alpha." He mentions "alpha" because some remains are so entangled that it's difficult to distinguish whether

they are from individual bodies.

The excavation site was slightly sloped, and the remains toward the lower area showed signs of execution. Victims' hands appeared to have been bound behind their backs. Bullet casings were found along with the remains, confirming that this indeed was a massacre site. The remains found higher up were stacked, and laid leaning against the wall, suggesting that bodies had been moved and piled there after death. It would be nearly impossible to identify who these remains belong to. CHO explained that the burial site had



Remains uncovered during the first round of excavation.
@THEHANN Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

two layers. After one group of bodies was buried, soil was laid over, and then more bodies were added later.

The site is located in a depression between a road and the Radio Monitoring Station's staff quarters. Previously, there had been a burial mound there. According to investigators, around early October 1950 at the time of the massacre, the wife of one of the victims had seen her husband's body but was unable to recover it. Instead, she gathered bodies near the communication tower that she could reach, buried them, and built a small burial mound. Every year afterward, she trimmed the weeds around the mound and held a memorial service. During excavation, the mound was dug open, but everything had decomposed and nothing could be recovered. However, when workers dug deeper, numerous remains began to emerge. Victims killed at this site were villagers

from Ugang and Hapdeok in Dangjin, executed by police and right-wing militia for allegedly cooperating with the North Korean People's Army or leftist forces.

The Sodeulgangmun Plain, surrounding Ugang-myeon, Dangjin, has fertile and expansive land, with access to a port that opens to the Yellow Sea via the Sapgyocheon River, making it easy to transport harvested rice. Much of the land was owned by landlords from Seoul, who managed tenant farmers through stewards. This led to deep conflict among landlords, stewards, and tenants. For this reason, Ugang-myeon, like Hapdeok-myeon to the South, was well-known for being active in social movements. Various organizations were active here such as *Singanhoe* during the time of Japanese occupation, as well as the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the Korean State, and later the People's Committee, immediately before the outbreak of the Korean War.



Surrounding area of the excavation site as seen on a map produced in 1927. @National Land Information Platform

Layer upon layer of conflict erupts across the once quiet vast plains.

The mass civilian killings in the Dangjin area began, as in many other regions, with the execution of National Guidance Alliance members by the military and police. Subsequently, when the North Korean forces occupied this area, right-wing figures were targeted and killed. However, after the area was recaptured by South

Korean forces, the police and right-wing militia would hunt down and kill those suspected of collaborating with the enemy. One of the sites where this cycle of violence and retaliation exploded most brutally was the pit next to the Songsan-ri Radio Monitoring Station.

Among the items found with the remains was a large iron blade, as thick as an adult's forearm. Excavation team leader CHO identified it not as a spear but as a knife sharpened on one side, illustrating the brutality of the killings. The victims from Ugang-myeon were taken by right-wing militia, and detained in a warehouse where they were scheduled for execution. Most were then taken to the radio transmission tower, where they were killed.

Families still await the recovery of remains ... “Please understand our pain.”

LIM Hong-bin, president of the Dangjin Association of Families of Civilian Victims Before and After the Korean War, also lost his father at this time when so-called “collaborators with the enemy” were being executed. LIM's family were wealthy farmers, well known in Gangmun-ri, Ugang-myeon, owning approximately 100,000 square meters of rice paddies and employing three farmhands. Gangmun-ri is located on soft ground unsuitable for tile-roofed houses, so the best homes were built with tin roofs instead of



LIM Hong-bin, president of the Dangjin Association of Families of Civilian Victims Before and After the Korean War



Retaliation led to even more brutal retaliation — an iron blade as thick as an adult's forearm was found.

Second round of excavation underway in the deepened pit next to the Songsan-ri Radio Monitoring Station.



thatch. LIM's house, one of the few with a tin roof, was considered the finest in the area. He recalled, at age five, seeing people wearing hats and red headbands occupying the courtyard of their home. It was October 2, 1950, shortly after the retreat of the North Korean forces. Police came and arrested his father, accusing him of supporting the Communists. His father was taken to Ugang police station and later killed in the pit near the Radio Monitoring Station.

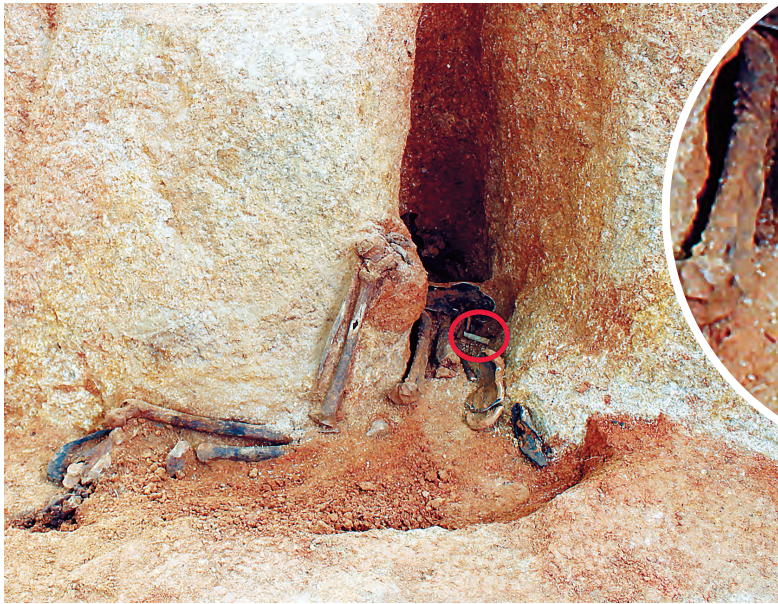
After his father's death, LIM's mother continued to farm with the help of the farmhands. By selling off parts of their land, she managed to support the family, and LIM was able to graduate high school. Interestingly, he did his military service with the 102nd Security Unit in Chuncheon, and said his commanding officer wrote favorable reports about him, making his time there easier.

The Dangjin Association of Families of Civilian Victims was established in 2018 in Hapdeok, and now has around 90 members. When asked what prompted the group's formation, LIM explained that it was actually his son who first became interested in investigating his grandfather's death. LIM was critical about the local government's attitude and lack of support. He said that although funding for the exhumation had already been secured by May 2024, the actual dig began a year later because of the local government's indifference and slow response. LIM hopes to conduct DNA tests for the members once the excavation is complete and to build a memorial monument at the site. However, there is still much work to be done, as there are families whose cases remain unresolved, and others who have yet to come forward.

The burial mound that existed before the excavation.

@THEHANN Research Institute of Cultural Heritage





A spent cartridge (red circle) rests on top of the shoes found with the remains.

A bullet casing is found laying on a pair of shoes.

After lunch with LIM and listening to more of his stories, I returned to the excavation site. As I leaned in and peered down the pit, wanting to take a few more photos before I left, the oldest-looking worker inside the pit pointed to a spot with his hand hoe. With my camera dangling from my hand and trying to avoid stepping on any remains, I cautiously climbed down. The spot he indicated was along the wall facing the road at the upper side of the pit. In the morning, part of a long, thick leg bone had been exposed there, and now in a recessed hollow next to it lay some human remains, a few shoes, and a spent cartridge, likely from an execution shot.

Afterwards, on the drive back from the site, I kept thinking about those shoes. Were they rubber

shoes? Leather shoes? At one point, they would have cushioned strong legs and warm living feet. They would have carried mud from the fields, brushed against roads, and rested neatly on a stone step beneath a wooden porch. One day, the shoes might have wondered why the owner's feet were trembling, but they would have simply followed wherever those feet led them. The shoes would have been startled by the loud, unfamiliar noise, shattering the legs and chilling the feet. Yet, surprisingly the feet did not slip out of the shoes for quite some time. Unlike other shoes that are eventually crushed, abandoned, and thrown out, these shoes perhaps thought they were lucky, because they could hold their owner's feet for as long as they could. This thought made me say thank you to the shoes, for staying there all this time, together, and comforting the dead. 🙏

Launch Ceremony for the Preparation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's **Final Comprehensive Report**

On June 12, 2025, the TRCK held a ceremony at its office in Jung-gu, Seoul, to begin the preparation of its *Final Comprehensive Report*. <Photo>

Among the participants were Chairperson PARK Sun-young, Secretary General SONG Sang-gyo, and more than 80 staff members involved in the report's preparation. The participants had lively discussions about the direction of the *Final Comprehensive Report*. According to *Article 32 of the Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*, the TRCK is required to prepare a *Final Comprehensive Report* covering all of its activities and must submit it to the President and the National Assembly within six months after the end of its investigative activities.



Chairperson PARK Sun-young of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Meets with Minister of Justice **Both Agree to Further Inter-Agency Cooperation**

On May 29, 2025, Chairperson PARK Sun-young of the TRCK met with then-Minister of Justice PARK Sung-jae at the Gwacheon



Government Complex to discuss ways to enhance inter-agency cooperation. <Photo>

The two institutions agreed to maintain close communication and work together to address remedies for victims of state violence.

Chairperson PARK stated, “Every action taken by our Commission is organically linked to other government departments. Because we deal with 100 years of Korean modern and contemporary history, cooperation is essential not only with the legislative and executive branches but also with the judiciary to properly address past injustices and pursue reconciliation.” She added, “Moving forward, our Commission’s policy advisor and the Ministry of Justice’s national litigation officer will cooperate on practical challenges and efforts to support victims.” 



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

| All activity will end on November 26, 2025, after preparing the *Final Comprehensive Report* and submitting it to the President and National Assembly.

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Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (Second Term) Overview of Truth-Finding Decisions

As of May 26, 2025

Applications (Received)*

20,283 cases

Assigned to Investigation Bureau

20,924 cases

Closed

18,808 cases

Case Processing Rate

89.9 %

Truths Established
(including Confirmation**)

11,908 cases

Suspended

2,116 cases

* Applications (Received) Cases: Includes cases transferred or received from the Yeosu-Suncheon Incident Committee.

** Confirmation: First Commission cases that were reapplied to the Second Commission.

