

Truth and Reconciliation

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Truth and Reconciliation Commission,
Republic of Korea

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KIM Ju-sam, the victim of the "Abduction of North Korean Civilians by the Air Force Intelligence Service Unit," has been separated from his family as a result of State violence.

KIM's clock stopped on the night of 10 October 1956.

Born and raised in Yongyeon, Hwanghae-do, KIM had just started his second year of middle school when he was abducted by special agents dispatched to North Korea, separating him from his family forever.

The young errand boy, "Shorty," who did odd jobs for US soldiers stationed in South Korea, has now become an old man in his eighties with white hair.

Thanks to the truth-finding efforts of the Second Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he was compensated KRW 1.3 billion by the State. However, his only Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving) wish is to confirm the whereabouts and well-being of his family in North Korea.

Now is the time for South Korea to grant him his wish.



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 : 3 years from the date of the first decision to investigate, with the possibility of an extension of up to one year

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***Ex-officio* Investigation of Human Rights Violations at *Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* Confinement Institutions**

“To clarify the truth behind allegations of forced labor and ill-treatment.”

The largest mass confinement institutions in the Busan area from the 1960s to the early 1970s

“Human rights violations of teenage boys, truth clarification sought after 60 years”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea (hereinafter “the Commission”) has decided to conduct an *ex-officio* investigation into “Human Rights Violations at the *Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* Confinement Institutions.” These two facilities were the largest mass confinement institutions in the Busan area from the 1960s to the early 1970s.

This is the first time in its first and second terms that the Commission has opened an *ex-officio* investigation into human rights violations at mass confinement institutions. Investigations have also been launched for the seven applicants who formally applied for truth clarification in this matter.

[Investigation involves 343 victims including seven formal applications](#)

The Commission can conduct *ex-officio* investigations under the *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation*(hereinafter the “*Framework Act*”) when there is substantial evidence to recognize a historically significant incident as suitable for truth clarification and when the clarification of truth is deemed to be of significant importance.

At its 60th Regular Meeting, held at its office in Jung-gu, Seoul on 18 August, the Commission made its decision to launch an investigation after discovering new victims and human rights violations through



View of *Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* located in Jangnim-dong, Seo-gu (now Saha-gu), Busan, which operated from the 1960s to the early 1970s.

document research and victim interviews, as well as because it was determined that this case meets the requirements for an *ex-officio* investigation as stipulated in the *Framework Act* .

As a result, a comprehensive investigation will now be conducted into the human rights violations suffered by the victims who were housed under inadequate food, clothing, living conditions in the *Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* institutions in Busan. This investigation will focus on determining whether there were infringements on their right to education as well as whether they were subjected to ill-treatment such as physical abuse, sexual assault, and forced labor.

This investigation involves a total of 343 victims, including the seven applicants who formally submitted applications for truth clarification to the Commission, 28 victims who were accepted by the “Comprehensive Support Center for Victims of the Brothers Home” operated by the Busan City Government, and 308 victims who have been identified through various records and news reports.

Furthermore, any additional victims identified through document research and victim interviews, regardless of whether they have applied for truth clarification, shall also be included in this investigation. The Commission shall begin its investigation of the two institutions by collecting documents from relevant agencies, interviewing victims, and consulting with experts.

Media coverage and victims’ association motivate the decision to conduct the investigation

The decision to undertake the investigation was largely influenced by the concerted efforts of various stakeholders.

Up until the application deadline of 9 December 2022, a total of seven applicants had submitted requests to the Commission regarding human rights violations at the *Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* institutions. They requested truth-seeking investigations into illegal enforcement activities which led to their forced detention in deplorable conditions where they were denied their right to education and subjected to ill-treatment.

From November 2022, *Kookje Sinmun* , a local media outlet, began to extensively report on human rights violations that occurred at mass confinement institutions in the Busan area such as *Yeonghwasuk* , *Jaesaengwon* , *Chilseongwon*, and *Deokseongwon*. On 19 December 2022, the city of Busan officially requested the Commission to initiate an *ex-officio* investigation into human rights violations at mass confinement institutions in the Busan area.

Additionally, on 22 December 2022 the “*Yeonghwasuk* and *Jaesaengwon* Victims’ Association” was formed with the goal of locating victims and survivors who were housed at these facilities at the time and engaging in collective actions, which eventually led to their request for an *ex-officio* investigation by the Commission. Fueled by this societal momentum, the Commission decided to initiate an *ex-officio* investigation into this matter on 29 August 2023.

So far, the Commission has launched six *ex-officio* investigations. Investigations have been carried out progressively from 2022, starting with the first *ex-officio* investigation which was made for the case of human rights violations against fishermen who were abducted and repatriated by North Korea.

[Ex-officio investigations into human rights violations of abducted and repatriated fishermen and the massacre of religious figures during the Korean War](#)

The “Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea” was the first *ex-officio* investigation launched by the Commission. It involves the investigation of whether there were any unlawful interrogations or human rights violations committed by investigative agencies against the fishermen when they returned from North

Korea. In February 2023, the truth was clarified for 150 crew members from 23 vessels, and in May, a second decision was reached for 160 crew members from seven vessels. Furthermore, the majority of victims undergoing retrials have been acquitted by the courts.

The second *ex-officio* investigation launched by the Commission in April 2022, “Civilian Killings in Shinan Jeollanam-do,” is divided into two tracks: one involving the killing of civilians by the military and police in Shinan-gun around the time of the Korean War and the other involving killings by hostile forces. In November 2022, the Commission made its first decision on this case and established the truth for 64 victims of hostile forces. Subsequently, in July and August of this year, two further decisions were made for 15 and 134 victims, respectively, bringing the total number of victims of hostile forces for whom the truth has been clarified to 213. Meanwhile, the first decision for victims killed by the military and police (24 victims) was obtained in July of this year.

In addition, investigations into incidents related to the “March 15th Democracy Movement,” (such as the Busan-Masan Democratic Protests) for which the Commission opened an *ex-officio* investigation in October 2022, have gained momentum.

Wives, Siblings, and Parents were taken and killed

“The State must request an apology from North Korea”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has established the truth in cases where families of public officials, teachers, military and police personnel, or those who refused to support leftists, were killed by hostile forces. The Commission recommended that the Government provide restitution to the victims of these incidents. Of particular high interest was the decision made for 31 victims from nine families who were



Witness HONG [NAME REDACTED] is pointing to a house in Seokjeong-ri where his father, a former police officer from Chunyang-myeon, Hwasun-gun, Jeollanam-do was killed by leftists while in hiding in February 1951. The homeowner's wife and sister-in-law were also killed and the daughter-in-law was injured.

massacred in Hwasun, Jeollanam-do.

[Hwasun massacre leaves 45 dead, many of whom were women, children, and the elderly](#)

On 18 August 2023, during its 60th Regular Meeting, the Commission made a truth clarification decision on the “**Killings by Hostile Forces in Hwasun, Jeollanam-do (2)**” involving 45 villagers from nine *myeon* districts in Hwasun-gun. From September 1950 until September of the following year, these villagers were killed by the North Korean People's Army, local leftists, and partisan guerillas.

Among the victims, 29% were women (13 victims), 9% were children under the age of 10 (4 victims), and 20% were elderly individuals aged 51 or older (9 victims). In one particular case, 31 individuals from nine families were killed together alongside their wives, siblings, or parents. In the case of the LEE [NAME REDACTED] family from Wolpyeong-ri, Chunyang-myeon, all 11 family members were taken and killed alongside each other. These conclusions were reached after a thorough review and analysis

of various sources, including the *National List of Anti-Communist Youth Patriots*, the US War Crimes Division reports, and the *Report on the Fact-Finding Results of the Hwasun Massacre*, as well as family records, genealogies, and statements from applicants and witnesses.

The Commission also made a decision that the truth is established for the “**Killings by Hostile Forces in Gochang, Jeollabuk-do (1)(2)**” at its 58th and 62nd Regular Meetings. These cases involve residents of Gochang-gun, Jeollabuk-do who were killed by local leftists, volunteer armies, and members of *Mincheongdan*. The Commission has recommended that the State provide reparation to victims.

Victims were killed because they were police officers, military, government officials, teachers, or members of their families. They were also targeted for reasons such as wealth, refusal to cooperate with leftists, or involvement in rightist activities. Some people were killed because of their alleged membership in right-wing organizations, although it was unclear if they were actually members.

The Commission’s first ruling in this case involved 151 victims who were killed in places such as Seongsan, Gochang-eup and the Yejeon Reservoir in Gongeum-myeon. The second ruling involved 44 victims who were killed in locations such as the Sokgul Reservoir in Yejeon-ri, Seokgyo-ri pass, and the hills in front of Gongeum Middle School. Due to the fact that most of the killings were directed at families, there were a relatively high number of victims under the age of 20,

many of whom were women.

[Sinan massacre leaves 134 civilians dead ... killed because of religion and wealth](#)

The massacre of 134 villagers in Sinan-gun, Jeollanam-do from August to October 1950 also came to light after 73 years. At its 61st Regular Meeting on 29 August, the Commission made a decision that the truth is established for the “**Killings by Hostile Forces in Sinan, Jeollanam-do (3)**.”

According to the findings of the investigation, killings continued in villages across Sinan-gun from 24 July 1950, when the North Korean People's Army assumed control of Mokpo, until 2 October 1950, when the Republic of Korea Army landed in Mokpo. Local leftists massacred residents and their families in Abhae-eup, Amtae-myeon, Jeungdo-myeon, and Imja-myeon for reasons such as being Christian or a family member of a police officer, having right-wing affiliations, or being wealthy. Victims were either drowned or executed by firing squad, and were mostly male farmers in their 20s to 30s including a significant number of children.

The Commission has urged the State to seek an apology from the North Korean regime for the serious damages it has caused during the Korean War including civilian massacres, and recommended that the State and local governments work to restore the honor of the victims and their families, support memorial projects, and strengthen peace and human rights education in order to promote national reconciliation and unity.

Military and police massacre unarmed civilians for being members of the National Guidance Alliance

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has made truth clarification decisions regarding cases in Gyeongsang-do where mass killings of unarmed civilians were carried out following the outbreak of

the Korean War. Members of the National Guidance Alliance (*Kookmin Bodo Yeonmaeng*) or those suspected of possibly aligning with the North Korean People's Army were killed by military and police.



Abandoned mine at Yeohangsan Mountain in Yeoyang-ri, Jinjeon-myeon, Masan (currently Masanhappo-gu in Changwon city) where the “National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Jinju, Gyeongsangnam-do” took place.

Total 48 deaths in Jinju, “mostly common farmers”

During its 60th Regular Meeting held on 18 August, the Commission rendered a decision that the truth is established regarding the “**The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Jinju, Gyeongsangnam-do (2).**” This case involves 48 civilians from Jinju who were killed after being detained by the police around July 1950 for joining the National Guidance Alliance.

Most of the victims were farmers in their 20s to 40s. After being detained at locations such as Jinju police substations, detention centers, or the Jinju Correctional Institution, they were subsequently massacred by the Jinju Police, the Jinju District CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps) under the Army Intelligence Agency, and the Jinju Military Police at locations like Gwanji-ri (Hwaryeongol and Dakjokgol) and Yongsan-ri (Yongsan Pass) in Jinjeon-myeon, Masan (currently Masanhappo-gu in Changwon city).

Mass civilian killings in Geochang (19), Geojae (23), and Daegu (25)

During its 59th Regular Meeting on 18 July, **the Commission also made truth clarification decisions for “The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Geochang, Gyeongsangnam-do (1),” “The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Geojae, Gyeongsangnam-do (1),” and “The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Daegu (1).”**

“The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Geochang, Gyeongsangnam-do (1),” refers to the case where 19 villagers were killed by the police in locations near Maryeongjae, Myosan-myeon and Gwonbinjae, Bongsan-myeon, both in Hapcheon-gun. The victims were primarily unarmed men in their 20s to 30s, with a significant number being the eldest sons in their families. They were either taken into custody by the Geochang Police or received summon notices to appear at the police station where they were subsequently detained. In addition to the police station's detention center, some victims were detained at warehouses owned by banks or distilleries. They were then collectively killed at locations in Maryeongjae, Myosan-myeon, Hapcheon-gun and Gwonbinjae, Bongsan-myeon, Hapcheon-gun around 21 July and 27 July 1950, respectively.

“The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Geojae, Gyeongsangnam-do (1),” is a case which involves 23 villagers who were collectively killed by the Geoje Police Station, the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), and the Navy G-2 in locations such as the coastal waters of Jangseungpo. Among the victims, 22 were men in their 20s to 30s, and there was one female victim.

“The National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Daegu (1)” case involved 25 civilians from Daegu who were killed because they joined the National Guidance Alliance or cooperated with leftists. The police in the Daegu region, the 22nd Regiment Military Police, and the CIC detained them under preventive detention orders. Subsequently, between June and September of that year, they were

killed in locations such as Yonggye-ri Valley in Gachang-myeon, Dalseong-gun, and the Gyeongsan Cobalt Mines.

Investigation findings were able to confirm the locations where victims were killed in addition to Yonggye-ri Valley in Gachang-myeon, Dalseong-gun, and the Gyeongsan Cobalt Mines in Daegu which were identified by the Commission in its first term as massacre sites. They include Jungseok Mine in Sangwon-ri, Gachang-myeon, Dalseong-gun, and Donghwacheon in Jimyo-dong, Dong-gu, Daegu (submerged area of Gongsan Dam).

The Commission has determined that the actions of State authorities such as the police, in unlawfully killing unarmed civilians without due judicial process constitute a violation of the basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including the right to life and the right to a fair trial. Consequently, the Commission has recommended that the State and local governments issue official apologies, support victim recovery and commemorative projects, reflect these incidents in historical records, and organize peace and human rights education.



Pass in Songjuk-ri, Guseong-myeon where the “National Guidance Alliance and Preventive Detention Incident in Gimcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do” took place. Some villagers claimed to have seen human remains in this area during their childhood.

Second round of clarification (confirmation) for 86 Korean War abductees “North Korea must apologize and repatriate survivors”

During its 60th Regular Meeting held on 18 August, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirmed the existence of 86 individuals who were abducted by North Korea during the Korean War and made

a decision that the truth is established regarding the “**Hostile Forces (Abduction during the War) Incident (2).**”

This case refers to the events that occurred during



Monument dedicated to Korean War abductees at the National Memorial for Abductees during the Korean War.

the Korean War from 25 June, 1950 to 27 July, 1953 where South Korean civilians, excluding military personnel, were forcibly taken to North Korea and were detained or relocated there. This is the Commission's second decision of truth clarification regarding civilians abducted by North Korea after its first decision for 68 abductees in November of last year.

The Commission confirmed the identity of the 86 abductees based on witness statements, as well as through the review of documents from the Commission of Finding the Truth of the Damage from North Korea's Abduction during the Korean War and Restoring Honor of Victims such as the "*Notice of Decision as Korean War Abductee*," "*Written Verdict on Korean War Abductees*," and the "*Investigation Report on the Truth of Abductees by North Korea during the Korean War*." The identified individuals are distributed regionally as follows: 43 in Seoul, 28 in Gyeonggi, 9 in Incheon, 3 in Gyeongsang, 2 in Gangwon, and 1 in Chungcheong.

Most abductees were taken to North Korea prior to the South Korean government's recapture of Seoul. Many

of these individuals were taken from their homes, and in some cases, they were transported from their homes to detention facilities. The abducted individuals were a diverse group, including farmers, workers, politicians, individuals who resisted the North Korean regime, professionals with technical skills, those forcibly conscripted into the volunteer army, and forced laborers. The Commission recognized that the perpetrators included various entities such as the North Korean People's Army, local leftists, and the North Korea Political Security Agency, but fundamentally categorized these incidents as organized war crimes committed by the North Korean regime.

The Commission has recommended that the Government officially apologize to the Korean War abductees and their families, as well as urge the North Korean regime to confirm the status of the living abductees and repatriate them. Additionally, the Commission recommended that the government issue an apology for its failure to fulfill its duty to ensure the safety of its citizens and establish a commemorative day for remembrance, among other measures, to support victim recovery and reflect these incidents in historical records.

Truth confirmed for twelve additional victims in the *Seosan* Pioneering Group case

“First confirmation of victims being forcibly transferred from the Seoul Municipal Child Protection Center”

On 12 September, during its 62nd Regular Meeting, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission decided that the truth is established regarding “***Seosan* Pioneering Group Incident (2).**” In its decision, the Commission



Members of the *Seosan* Pioneering Group move stones near Tobi Mountain to create a reservoir.

confirmed that vagrants who were rounded up by the police and government officials and initially placed in the Seoul Municipal Child Protection Center, were later forcibly transferred to the Pioneering Group. With this decision, the *Seosan* Pioneering Group Incident - the first case among cases related to human rights violations in mass confinement institutions to undergo truth clarification - has come to an end. The investigation into this case was initiated in May 2021 and ended with truth clarification for 287 victims in the first round of investigations and 12 victims in the second round.

According to investigation results, among the vagrants who were rounded up by the police and government officials in 1961 and placed in the Seoul

Municipal Child Protection Center, 137 of them were subsequently sent to the Daehan Youth Technology Academy, an organization operated by MIN [NAME REDACTED], head of the Pioneering Group. Among them, at least 14 were forcibly transferred to the *Seosan* Pioneering Group. Additionally, new evidence showed that on 13 June 1962, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (currently the Ministry of Health and Welfare) reported to the Cabinet on its progress in implementing the “Unattended Youth Settlement Project.”

The *Seosan* Pioneering Group incident refers to an initiative by the Government in the early 1960s to develop the Seosan area of Chungcheongnam-do as

part of its “social purification” policy.

Around 1,700 orphans and vagrants were arrested and detained without proper legal procedures by the police and military forces, and forcibly transferred to the Pioneering Group. After confirming the human rights violations that took place in the Pioneering Group such as forced detention, physical abuse, forced labor, and orced marriages, the Commission recommended that the Government issue an official apology and provide measures for victim recovery. Furthermore, the Commission recommended the need for a Special Act to compensate victims for the cancellation of land distribution rights promised to them for cultivating an abandoned salt farm into arable land.



Seosan City opened the graves of members of the *Seosan* Pioneering Group and created a potter's field.

A total of 2,482 recommendations are issued by the Commission in its second term

“Restoration of the honor of victims is necessary” stresses the Commission to government agencies.

Ordinance to support victims of human rights violations at mass confinement institutions is passed.

Since its launch in December 2020, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has made recommendations to relevant government agencies and local authorities regarding the cases that it has ruled on. As of the end of August, the Commission has issued one policy recommendation and 2,482 recommendations for the restoration of the honor of victims for the cases it has investigated, including “confirmation” cases.

[Amended *Framework Act* takes effect in September with new provisions for implementation of recommendations](#)

The current *Framework Act on Settling the Past for Truth and Reconciliation* (hereinafter the “*Framework Act*”) only specifies that the Government should implement the recommendations included in the

Comprehensive Report published before the end of the Commission's activities, referred to as “Comprehensive Recommendations.” It does not separately define or govern “Individual Recommendations,” which are recommendations issued by the Commission for specific cases it investigates during its term. This has been criticized because it can cause delays in government agencies implementing recommendations for victims’ honor restoration and compensation.

On 27 February, the National Assembly passed an amendment to the *Framework Act*. The amendment includes provisions that 1) require recommendations to be included in the semi-annual investigation reports submitted to the National Assembly and the President, 2) specify the Minister of the Interior and Safety as the authority responsible for managing the implementation

of recommendations, and 3) mandate that heads of government agencies responsible for recommendations submit implementation plans to the Ministry of the Interior and Safety within three months of receiving the recommendations and report the results after implementation.

However, because the amended law takes effect on 22 September, six months after its promulgation, the Commission has been working in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, which oversees work related to the settlement of past affairs, and the Support Team for Past Affairs within the Ministry to establish a task force for the implementation of recommendations

for major cases before the amended law takes effect.

In the first half of 2023, the task force met to discuss implementation plans proposed by relevant authorities responsible for the remediation of human rights violations at *Seongam Academy*, *Brothers Home*, *Seosan Pioneering Group*, and of abducted and repatriated fishermen from North Korea.

Based on the provisions of Article 32.4, 34, and 39 of the *Framework Act*, the Commission provides recommendations to the Government in its decision statements. These recommendations typically include measures to restore the honor of victims and their



The repatriated fishermen from the *Geonseol-ho* and *Pungseong-ho* fishing vessels, along with their families, are celebrating after being acquitted for charges of violating anti-communist laws at their retrial, held at the Sokcho branch of Chuncheon District Court on 9 November 2022.

families, legal and political reconciliation concerning perpetrators, as well as methods to achieve national reconciliation and unity.

The amendment of the *Framework Act* and the operation of the task force has greatly helped with the implementation of recommendations. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations regarding the three major cases of human rights violations at mass confinement institutions: *Seongam Academy*, *Brothers Home*, and *Seosan Pioneering Group*.

Ordinance to support victims of human rights violations at mass confinement institutions is "welcomed"


Remedies for victims of "Human Rights Violations of Children at *Seongam Academy*" began with an official apology from the Governor of Gyeonggi-do on 22 October 2022. This year, a total of KRW 1.42 billion was allocated to the comprehensive support budget for victims, which is used to pay consolation money of KRW 5 million and monthly livelihood support of KRW 200,000 to the victims. In addition, based on the recommendations of the Commission, a comprehensive support plan for the victims has been established and implemented. This plan includes, among other things, the establishment of a victim support center, trauma resolution programs, strengthened medical services, cemetery care, memorial culture festivals, and the

establishment of historical museums.

Victims of "Human Rights Violations at *Brothers Home*" are also being compensated according to the recommendations of the Commission. In 2023, a budget of KRW 200 million has been allocated for medical expense support, providing up to KRW 5 million per person as support for their out-of-pocket medical expenses. Next year, the budget for victim compensation will be increased to provide consolation money of KRW 5 million and monthly livelihood support of KRW 200,000, similar to the level of support offered to the victims of *Seongam Academy*.

As for the victims of the "*Seosan Pioneering Group Incident*," the *Chungcheongnam-do Ordinance on Support for Victims of Past Affairs whose Truth has been Clarified* was passed on 25 July, establishing a basis for support. Along with the victims of the *Seongam Academy* and *Brothers Home* incidents, victims of the "*Seosan Pioneering Group Incident*" will be able to receive substantial support starting from 2024.

The Commission intends to make every effort, in partnership with relevant government agencies, to ensure that its recommendations are faithfully implemented in accordance with the amended law as well as subsequent amendments to the presidential decree.



KIM Ju-sam, a victim of the “Abduction of North Korean Civilians by the Air Force Intelligence Unit,” points to his hometown in Yongyeon-eup, Yongyeon-gun, Hwanghae-do, on the map. He visited Baengnyeongdo Island, which is near his hometown, four years ago with his eldest daughter’s family, but he is hesitant to visit again because it saddens his heart.”

Interview KIM Ju-sam, awarded KRW 1.3 billion in State compensation

“The Commission put a lot of effort into clarifying the truth”

Author PARK Gil-ja / Photographer KIM Young-sook

North Korean boy attending middle school second grade is abducted and forcibly detained in military base.

“For 67 years, don’t know whether my family is alive or dead … wish I could at least hear their voices.”

KIM Ju-sam (86), a victim of “Abduction of North Korean Civilians by the Air Force Intelligence Unit,” was awarded a court verdict for KRW 1.3 billion in State compensation as a result of the truth-finding efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It has been 67 years since he was abducted by three special agents dispatched by Republic of Korea (ROK) forces to North Korea.

On 6 July, the 9th Civil Division of the Seoul High Court ruled that the State should pay the plaintiff a total of KRW 1.3 billion, including consolation money of KRW 300 million for forced detention in a military camp, and stated that “the plaintiff has been separated from his family and has experienced severe mental suffering while enduring indescribable loneliness, as a result of the defendant’s (Republic of Korea) abduction.” The decision became final when the prosecution waived its right to appeal.

KIM’s abduction was brought to light for the first time when the Commission began its investigation into his case. In the ensuing lawsuit filed by KIM against the State, the Commission’s findings and decision were cited in the court’s ruling on the State’s liability for damages and application of the statute of limitations. Ahead of the *Chuseok* holiday, we met with KIM and listened to his thoughts about being awarded State

compensation.

The elderly man, his face lined with deep wrinkles, burst into hearty laughter as he spoke of his North Korean mother. Sixty-seven years had passed since he was a young boy in middle school, and now he was a white-haired old man, but his mother remained eternally young in his memory. “She had the graceful appearance of a wealthy family’s daughter-in-law, with neatly combed, elegant hair that is vivid in my memory,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

[The story of a family torn apart by state violence](#)

KIM Ju-sam’s (86) abduction by the Air Force Intelligence Unit is the story of a family torn apart by state violence. On the late night of 10 October 1956, the middle school second grader from Yongyeon-eup, Yongyeon-gun, Hwanghae-do, was abducted and painfully separated from his family by South Korean special agents who were dispatched to North Korea. He was held captive for four years at the Air Force 25th Intelligence Unit in Oryu-dong, Seoul, where he was subjected to forced labor, and then later released. However, even after his release, he spent 67 years alone without being able to return home.

On the afternoon of 1 September, a month before



KIM Ju-sam writes a letter to his siblings in North Korea saying, "I really miss you. I hope we can meet at least once."

Chuseok, we met him at his home in Goyang, Gyeonggi-do. It was a small rental unit with a single bed in the living room that was adjacent to another small room and a bathroom. He had just returned from a local senior citizens' birthday party organized by a local welfare center. When asked about his thoughts on winning his case against the Government, he expressed longing and sadness for his North Korean family rather than talk about the tedious litigation process or the hardships and pain he suffered in his life.

"Mom (KIM Deok-bong) had a difficult life after liberation. When I was young, my father passed away... And my siblings ... although their faces have become vague in my memory, I still vividly remember their names and we were just a couple of years

younger than each other. Hyeong-sin, Song-ja, Ju-dong, and Hyeong-seong. They may be much older now, but I would still call them by their names. I really miss them. I don't know when it will happen, but I hope to meet them at least once."

KIM wished to convey a heartfelt *Chuseok* greeting to his siblings in North Korea, saying, "I hope all of you are healthy and well."

Chuseok day on 19 September 1956 was uneventful. Only three years had passed since gunshots had silenced and the Korean War ended with the signing of the Armistice Agreement, so there was little festive atmosphere during the holidays. Then, during the late night of 10 October that year, only one month after the *Chuseok* holiday, KIM's life is completely turned upside down. Three armed men, wearing South Korean military uniforms, invaded his home while he was preparing for bed. These intruders were special agents dispatched to North Korea by the ROK Air Force 25th Intelligence Unit. KIM was afraid, but quietly followed them, concerned that his younger siblings might face harm if he resisted.

"I was taken on a small boat and ended up on what was then South Korea's Baengnyeongdo Island. Two days later, I was taken to Oryu-dong, Seoul, where the US 6006th Unit and the Air Force 25th Intelligence Unit were stationed. I was interrogated, and for a year, they asked me about the location of military bases in Hwanghae-do and related terrain

features like bridges, schools, and mountains. For the first few months, I did odd jobs like shining shoes as a “shoeshine boy” at the US 6006th Unit. They called me “Shorty.” Later, I worked for three years without pay in the transportation department, sleeping amongst soldiers or living alone in a small room within the unit.”

One can only imagine how hard it must have been for KIM’s mother when her eldest son, the mainstay of the family after her husband’s death, disappeared suddenly. Her world must have crumbled around her. As for the boy, being forcibly separated from his mother, siblings, hometown, and school to find himself in an unfamiliar land must have been terrifying as well. He had no idea of why he had been kidnapped. He is interrogated for a year by US and South Korean military officials, but it was unlikely that a 19-year-old boy would have any military intelligence to provide.

[“I thought Korea would be reunified soon and that I would be released.”](#)

At that time, he believed that the reunification of Korea would happen within three to five years, and he would be released. Among the members of the Air Force Intelligence Unit, there were those who sympathized with the boy's plight and helped him. LIM Jung-cheol, in his testimony to the Commission said, “I saw Ju-sam sneaking out at night, holding onto the wire fence and crying so many times that I felt sorry for him and took care of him a lot even after my discharge.”

South Korea barely provided educational opportunities to a young boy who had only completed elementary

school. Around 1961, KIM was discharged from the military unit, and was given temporary resident registration at the address of a civilian officer who worked at the Transportation Division near the Intelligence Unit. This changed KIM’s legal domicile to Oryu-dong, Seoul and no longer Hwanghae-do, North Korea.

KIM Ju-sam's life in South Korea was a struggle for survival. Police surveillance and monitoring continued for over 60 years. He married a woman (LEE Seung-ja) from the same province as him, Hwanghae-do, and they had a son and a daughter, but they couldn't escape poverty. His wife, who helped with this interview due to her husband's poor hearing, recalled those times.

“I didn’t even have 10 won, so I started selling bean sprouts from the third day after getting married. I went from house to house, selling them by the month. I used other people's land to plant vegetables and roses, which I sold to make a living. Both of our children got married while we were living in greenhouses. We moved about fifteen times and lived in extreme poverty. I worked until I was seventy, and my husband did, too.”

KIM Ju-sam worked various jobs, including working at a razor blade mill and a gum factory before moving on to landscape labor such as tree planting and digging. However, maintaining a stable job was difficult due to social discrimination and prejudice. He struggled to make ends meet by working as a day laborer. The surveillance officers who were watching him even brought him rice and gifts over the

holidays because of his poverty. Only after moving into government-subsidized housing 20 years ago and obtaining Basic Living Assistance did his life become more comfortable. However, not being able to send his artistically talented daughter, Myeong-hee, and smart son, Yun-seong, to college remained a lifelong regret for him and his wife.

[“I couldn’t tell anyone about my abduction because I thought they would come for me.”](#)

KIM Ju-sam never revealed to anyone that he was forcibly abducted from North Korea. Even his wife didn't find out until several years into their marriage. He never told anyone even during the height of North-South family reunions.

“When I left the unit, they told me never to talk about what happened to me to anyone. I didn’t get an education. I worked manual labor my whole life, eat and work, eat and work ... I thought if I didn’t listen to those people, I’d be taken away without a trace, so I kept my mouth shut. I couldn't say a word. I didn’t know what to do because I didn’t know anything.”

It was his children who filed a civil suit against the Government in 2020, demanding acknowledgement of the forced abduction and detention and seeking compensation for damages. When KIM was unable to obtain evidence due to the Government’s apathetic attitude during the lawsuit, he turned to the Commission for assistance. After a year and two months of investigation, the Commission determined that the KIM Ju-sam case constituted a “serious

violation of human rights,” and recommended that the Government sincerely apologize, provide measures to restore honor, and offer opportunities for reunions with his North Korean family. The Commission concluded that the actions of the Air Force Intelligence Unit, in abducting North Korean civilians under the pretext of espionage and detaining them in South Korea, violated the constitutional rights to physical integrity and freedom of movement (right to leave and return).

[“The Commission did a huge thing.”](#)

In the past year since his truth has been clarified by the Commission, significant changes have occurred in KIM’s life. He was in the midst of a lawsuit against the Government, claiming KRW 1.5 billion in compensation. In the first instance, he received a partial victory with the court ruling that “the defendant should pay one billion won to the plaintiff.” In the second instance, the court increased the compensation amount to KRW 1.3 billion.

“The Commission really put in a lot of effort. To uncover the truth ... not only just help with the trial, but they did a huge thing. I’m truly grateful to the people who conducted the investigations.”

State violence took away the life of one individual who was someone's son and brother. However, despite knowing the truth, the Government remained silent. Former member of the Air Force Intelligence Unit, OH [NAME REDACTED], applied for compensation for his role in the abduction of KIM and other espionage activities in 2005 to the Ministry of National

Defense Special Missions Operatives Compensation Support Team. In 2008, OH was recognized as a special missions operative and received compensation from the Government. In 2013, the Prime Minister's Office conducted a direct investigation into KIM Ju-sam's case, confirming the facts of his abduction from North Korea. However, the Government took no further action.

Throughout the interview, KIM expressed his sense of injustice, but did not display strong indignation. He saw what happened to him as a tragedy that befell an individual in a country divided by superpowers such as the United States and the Soviet Union.

However, he did express disappointment, saying, "If only the verdict had come out five or ten years ago." KIM's health has deteriorated significantly during the last year. "He has been experiencing severe weakness in his legs and struggles to walk properly," his wife explained, showing a bag of medication brought back from the hospital.

The Ministry of Unification recently paid a visit to KIM's residence in Goyang to collect his hair and blood samples. Despite the recommendation of the Commission, the South Korean government has

not been actively pursuing a family reunion. This year, KIM applied for the Separated Families Search program, prompting the Government to collect genetic samples of abductees separated from their families in the North in order to prepare for any future inter-Korean exchanges involving separated families.

Every *Chuseok*, KIM Ju-sam visits *Mangbaedan* (alter for those who have lost their homes) at *Imjingak* to bow towards his hometown and remember his North Korean family. He has done this every Lunar New Year and *Chuseok*, except during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since being separated at the age of nineteen, he has lived his life without knowing the fate of his North Korean family. His sole wish, now approaching his nineties, is to know if they are still alive. Now is the time for South Korea to answer his wish.

"All sorts of things happened because of me alone. It feels like (life) is coming to an end now... I don't think my mother is still alive, and my youngest sibling should be around eighty by now... I wish we could have a video call or something. I just want to hear their voices, at least."

Exhumation

Target sites for exhumation in 2023 are confirmed

First time to excavate in the Gangwon area and for victims killed by hostile forces

Eight sites in five different regions including Samcheok and Gunsan

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has confirmed its plans for "Exhumation of Civilian Remains" in 2023. Continuing on from last year's efforts, this is the second round of exhumation, focusing on eight sites in five different regions around the country. The preliminary examination of the excavation sites began in August of this year, with the actual excavation scheduled to run approximately six months until 10 February of next year.

On 18 August, during its 60th Regular Meeting, the Commission received the "*Report on Commencement of the 2023 Civilian Remains Exhumation Project*" from the Institute of Korean Prehistory, which specializes in cultural heritage investigations. This report details the excavation targets for 2023.

Exhumation is conducted as part of actual first-hand investigations concerning civilian massacres around the time of the Korean War and human rights violations committed during the rule of authoritarian regimes. Building on last year's accomplishments, exhumation plans for this year include new locations in addition to the sites investigated last year.

For the first time in the Commission's first and second terms, exhumation activities will take place in the Gangwon region and sites believed to be burial grounds for victims killed by hostile forces.

In the Gangwon area, the presumed site of the "Samcheok Alleged Collaborators Incident," which has its address at San-Chilbeonji, Sangmaengbang-ri, Geundeok-myeon, Samcheok, has been selected as



a target for excavation. This location is believed to be the site where local residents from Geundeok-myeon, Samcheok, were arrested by the police around the end of December 1950 on suspicion of collaborating with the North Korean People's Army just before the "January-Fourth Retreat." After being detained in a nearby warehouse, they are assumed to have been collectively taken and killed along the coastline of Maengbang Beach and Palsongjeong Valley.

As for the excavation of sites related to killings by hostile forces, a cave within the grounds of Gunsan University at 290-2, Singwan-dong, Gunsan has been chosen in reference to the case of "Killings by Hostile Forces in Gunsan," which took place in Gunsan, Jeollabuk-do. This place is known as the site where on 27 September 1950, the North Korean People's Army massacred more than 120 civilians from the Miryong-dong area (then called Mi-dong). It was originally dug as a weapons depot during the Japanese colonial period.

Regarding cases of alleged collaboration with the enemy, excavation efforts will continue this year in the Asan and Seosan areas. This is because numerous remains were discovered in the Chungcheongnam-do region in 2022.

In the Asan area, excavation is scheduled for 644, 653, and 883 Beonji, Gongsu-ri, Baebang-eup, in relation to the "Asan Alleged Collaborators Incident."



In the Seosan area, excavation is slated for 176-9 Beonji, Galsan-dong, which is presumed to be the site of the "Seosan Alleged Collaborators Incident." Additionally, areas in Yeosu, Gyeonggi-do and Uljin, Gyeongsangbuk-do have been selected as target areas for exhumation as well in connection with cases involving the killing of alleged collaborators.

Furthermore, as part of an on-site investigation into human rights violations committed during authoritarian rule, exhumation shall be carried out in Seongam-dong, Gyeonggi-do, in relation to the "Human Rights Violations of Children at *Seongam Academy*," which has already undergone partial exhumation.

The inclusion of victims of hostile forces as the target for exhumation for the first time carries special significance. Until now, exhumation efforts for the remains of civilian victims who were killed around the time of the Korean War, were focused primarily on cases where it was presumed that numerous remains were left behind, such as cases involving the killing of alleged collaborators or National Guidance Alliance

members.

The Commission has already completed the initial surveys and preliminary examinations of the excavation target sites since last August. The plan now is to dig and excavate the sites, followed by forensic examination of remains and artifacts, and publication of investigation reports in that sequence.



Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea, “special law must be enacted to compensate and restore the honor of victims”

The Commission hosts “Symposium on the Human Rights Violations of Abducted and Repatriated Fishermen with Government and Civil Sector”... National Assembly pledges, “legislative support.”

Following the acquittals in the retrials of victims of human rights violations among the fishermen that were abducted and repatriated by North Korea, the Commission has joined hands with the National



On 11 September, at the Seoul Press Center, LEE Sang-hoon, the Commission’s standing commissioner, chairs the event and delivers a speech at the “Symposium on Human Rights Violations of Abducted and Repatriated Fishermen with Government and Civil Sector.”

Assembly, civil society, and the media, to pursue the enactment of a special law to compensate and restore the honor of these victims.

On 11 September 2023, at the Seoul Press Center, the Commission hosted a “Symposium on the Human Rights Violations of Abducted and Repatriated Fishermen with Government and Civil Sector” Over 200 attendees, including victims, their families, and members of the National Assembly, came together to collectively advocate for the enactment of special law.

The case of “Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea” involves victims who were abducted by North Korea while fishing in the 1980s after the Korean War. Upon their return from the North, they were illegally detained, tortured, and prosecuted under the National Security Act. For decades, the victims, along with their families, were put under surveillance and stigmatized as spies. According to investigations, 459 fishing vessels were involved, with around 3,600 victims. The Commission is currently investigating 241 cases based on applications as well as conducting *ex-officio* investigations for 982 individuals (109 vessels). In February and May of this year, the Commission clarified the truth for 30 vessels and 310 fishermen.

The Symposium was co-hosted by the Commission, KIM Gyo-heung, Chairman of the National Assembly’s Public Administration and Security Committee, the offices of representatives LEE Yang-soo, HEO Yeong, and BAE June-young, and the Committee for the Enactment of a Special Law to



Victims, their families, members of the National Assembly, and civil society representatives gather at the “Symposium on Human Rights Violations of Abducted and Repatriated Fishermen with Government and Civil Sector,” hosted by the Commission, to collectively advocate for the enactment of a special law. Victims and their families attending the event.

Compensate Victims of Human Rights Violations of Fishermen who were Abducted and Repatriated by North Korea. The event was co-organized by MBC and Kangwon Ilbo. The attending members of the National Assembly expressed their full support and commitment, regardless of party affiliations, to actively cooperate at the National Assembly level to restore the honor of the victims. After this pledge of commitment, LEE Sang-hoon, the Commission’s standing commissioner, chaired the event which included presentations and discussions.