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I. Building a human rights city from a painful history

Gwangju is a city in the south west of South Korea with a population of 1.5 million and a history of resistance to colonialism and dictatorship. In May 1980, when citizens of Gwangju bravely challenged the military rulers, several thousand people were killed and injured. Despite the extreme fear of death, human dignity was respected, as citizens shared food, donated blood to the wounded and not a single store was looted. The movement was the beginning of the seven-year struggle towards democracy that culminated in South Korea's new democratic constitution being approved in 1987. Documents from the movement were listed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2011.

The so-called Gwangju Spirit, representing "human rights, democracy and peace", has become the core philosophy of the city's administration and the basis of the city's development as a human rights city. Since the start of the century a number of human rights mechanisms have been incorporated by the city's administration, such as city ordinances on the rights of disabled people, migrants, children, young people and the elderly in 2005, while a comprehensive human rights ordinance was established in 2009. Eventually, Gwangju, at one time known as the city of agony, became a leading human rights city in the country. The Gwangju Spirit plays a key role in building and maintaining human rights mechanisms regardless of changes of political leadership. It has been a key part of the city developing positive narratives from its painful history in order to construct its human rights city brand and promote a noble community spirit to tackle social challenges.

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II. Institutionalisation of human rights

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1. The human rights ordinance stipulates the structure of the institutionalisation of human rights in the city. The human rights charter and human rights ordinance bring human rights standards and principles to the city. While the charter presents a non-binding blueprint for the human rights city, the ordinance is a regulation that is legally binding on the city administration. The Human Rights Office (centre) and the Human Rights Civil Committee are the implementing organs of these human rights principles. As implementing tools for these human rights standards and principles, the ordinance also stipulates concrete human rights policies and programmes such as the Human Rights Master Plan, human rights indicators, the human rights ombudsmen system, human rights impact assessment, human rights education, etc.

Gwangju was the first local government in Korea to introduce a comprehensive human rights ordinance in 2009. The ordinance was fully revised in 2012 to contain the Human Rights Master Plan (Article 7), human rights indicators (Article 10), human rights education (Article 11), human rights centre (Article 12), the Gwangju Human Rights Charter (Article 19), international cooperation (Article 20), the Human Rights Civil Committee (Article 24) and the human rights impact assessment (Article 30).¹ In 2013, the ordinance was partially revised to legalise the new ombudsmen system. The city's human rights ordinance has inspired other local governments to draft similar ordinances. By April 2017, 16 metropolitan cities and another 82 cities, counties and districts had introduced a human rights ordinance out of the total 243 municipal and local level governments in Korea.

Gwangju established a Human Rights Office with 12 staff in August 2010, the first Korean local government to do so. The office had three teams: democracy and human rights; human rights and peace exchange; and the May 18 movement enhancement team. The Ombudsmen Support Team was established in 2013 and the office changed its title to the Human Rights and Peace Cooperation Office. In 2014 it was expanded to six teams with 28 staff. The office played a key role in institutionalising human rights in the city administration. The human rights bodies were established in all five districts in Gwangju and other local governments started to set up similar organs, following Gwangju's model. However, the Human Rights Office could not work effectively as the control tower for implementing human rights policies in all the departments due to the lack of a coordination mechanism. In order to solve this, the city recently raised the status of the office, calling it the Human Rights Bureau, and giving it 45 staff in three departments: democracy and human rights; May 18 movement enhancement; and North and South Korea exchange (2019). With this upgraded status, the Human Rights Bureau is expected to play a more active role as the control tower for human rights mechanisms. The bureau is also strengthening the coordination system with relevant city departments by monitoring the implementation of the annual action plans deriving from the second Human Rights Master Plan and the human rights impact assessment.

As another implementation body based on the human rights ordinance, the city established the Human Rights Civil Committee in 2012, which consisted of representatives from the city council and various human rights groups focussed on women, migrants, and the disabled, among others. The committee's role is to review the city's human rights policies and programmes and make a recommendation to the city administration. The city has also been participating in a monthly joint meeting with the city's education council, the Gwangju office of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, and NGOs to coordinate the implementation of human rights policies.

The same year, the city of Gwangju also set up the first five-year Human Rights Master Plan (2012–2016). The master plan had five major goals: developing human rights indicators, establishing the Human Rights Charter and review the ordinance, building a human

rights city brand, promoting human rights education, and strengthening international cooperation. However, this master plan did not contain concrete policy strategies or annual action plans for each major area of human rights. In 2018, the second Human Rights Master Plan was made for 2018–2021. The second master plan selected six core areas: improvement for the socially marginalised; build-up the human rights administration; form a human rights culture; establish a collaboration system for human rights administration; and strengthen the city's status as a human rights city. To fill the gaps in the first Human Rights Master Plan, 123 annual action plans have been finalised across 27 different departments to be applied over four years following dozens of consultation processes with experts, NGO groups and other administrative departments. Another feature of this master plan is that the disabled, the elderly, migrants, women and children were chosen as target groups.

The Gwangju Human Rights Charter was established in May 2012 and consists of five chapters and 18 articles. This was the first human rights charter in any Asian city and its development was democratically conducted through the voluntary participation of all social classes and open discussion between members of Gwangju society. After that, Gwangju developed 100 human rights indicators in five target areas and 18 practice subjects corresponding to the structure of the Gwangju Human Rights Charter. The indicators were designed to implement the charter by measuring the human rights condition of the citizens and providing valuable data and information to develop relevant human rights policies. Since 2013, each of the city's departments has made a concrete action plan for implementing relevant indicators at the start of the year, which serves as an annual action plan, and the results are evaluated at the end of the year. In reality, it was difficult to make all the city's departments take up human rights work as their major tasks, and equal concern about all the indicators often resulted in a lack of action.

2012 was also the year when the city launched a human rights education programme. One year later, 5,884 public officers, 5,165 social welfare institution workers, and 16,101 citizens received human rights education. In 2014, 1,346 teachers in nursery facilities joined the recipients of human rights education and the newly launched on-site programme dispatched human rights trainers to locations requested by citizens and conducted 190 training sessions with 8,044 participants in various institutions and local communities. Since 2016, the city has also been conducting human rights education with officials above grade 4, who tend to be decision-makers.

In 2013, the city established the human rights ombudsmen system, which investigates human rights violation or discrimination cases in the city's public sector. The city recruited one standing ombudsman and one investigator and appointed non-standing ombudsmen in six areas: the disabled, migrants, labourers, women and children, academia and general human rights. In April 2018, the city also appointed a women's rights investigator who would be responsible for counselling and investigating sexual violence against women employees. From 2013 to 2018, the ombudsmen provided consultation on 346 cases and issued a recommendation on 33 out of 78 registered cases.

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The city introduced the Gwangju Wage for Living Ordinance in December 2014.

III. Social inclusion policies

Chapter 3 of the Gwangju Human Rights Charter is about “The Warm City Supporting the Disadvantaged” by assuring a minimum standard of living, gender equality and women’s rights, rights for the proper care of children and the elderly, the rights of the disabled to live without discrimination and diverse culture and identity in the city (Articles 8–12).

Under the leadership of Mayor Yoon Jang-hyun (2014–2018), Gwangju decided upon six major areas in which urgent measures were necessary in late 2014: poverty, high suicide rates, migrants, irregular workers, out-of-school children and the mobility impaired. The city received 61 policy proposals after holding consecutive consultations with human rights experts and open forums to directly hear the opinions of citizens, especially socially marginalised groups, in 2015. The city took another three months to draw up a concrete action plan including budgeting, alongside officers from 17 relevant departments and human rights experts on each proposal. As a result, 45 action plans were finalised out of 61 proposals in May 2016. For example, in the area of migrants, 13 action plans were made on educating citizens about migrants’ rights, supporting them to form the migrant community, guaranteeing migrant participation in local society, establishing a comprehensive support network for migrants, identifying the living condition of migrants and broadening Korean language education for migrants. The city’s Human Rights Office coordinated all the processes.

The city of Gwangju also introduced the “24-hour activity support service for severely disabled people” in 2014, which was designed to return human life to those who could not live without protection and to those who had to sacrifice their own lives for them. The city introduced the Gwangju Wage for Living Ordinance in December 2014 and decided that 7,254 KW per hour (approximately \$7; 130% of the national minimum wage) should be the living wage for 2015, the highest of all the local governments in the country. It aimed to improve the living conditions of vulnerable workers and alleviate income inequality. A living wage has currently been applied to workers in the city’s public sector and rose steadily up to 8,840 KW per hour for 2018. The city plans to promote its application in the private sector.

One of the most representative of the city’s social inclusion policies was the status change regularising irregular public sector workers under Mayor Yoon Jang-hyun. Gwangju changed the employment status of all 859 workers in city hall, public corporations and city-invested institutions by the end of 2017, including 772 contract workers such as cleaners, security guards and information clerks. This policy was selected as one of 100 National Agendas by the new Korean government.

Since 2014, Gwangju has been putting huge efforts into introducing the so-called “Gwangju Job Model” , which is based on the tripartite agreement of the workers, the management and the city government. The city is trying to establish a maximum wage and to invest the money deriving from it to create new jobs. While workers receive a reduced wage, the city’s plan is to support decent living standards by providing better housing and social welfare services. Gwangju and the Hyundai Motor Company have signed an agreement to jointly invest to establish

an automotive plant based on the Gwangju Job Model on January 31st 2019. The city expects 1,000 decent new jobs to be created through this agreement.

Gwangju established a human rights impact assessment in 2017. It requires city officials to assess whether any discrimination or violation is being made against the socially marginalised before making ordinances and major policies that have a significant impact on the rights of citizens. A unique feature of the system is that the Human Rights Civil Committee has been given the power to select the subject of the assessment and to recommend necessary measures to the mayor. Over an approximately year-long period, 14 new and fully revised ordinances and 90 existing ordinances were subject to human rights impact assessment and 40 recommendations were made separately. The city also conducted a human rights impact assessment on 42 polling stations to ensure free access to the mobility impaired during the local election in June 2018. The “human rights impact assessment guidelines” for public buildings were introduced to adopt universal design and guarantee free access to socially marginalised groups. The Human Rights Office plans to include expected users such as the elderly, migrants and children in a list of assessment members to reflect their needs in a process of architectural design and construction. The Gwangju Safety Centre was selected to apply these guidelines and the city plans to broaden their application to public buildings step by step.

In 2017, Gwangju established a human rights impact assessment of the city's ordinances and policies.

Besides these individual social inclusion policies, sustainable policies should be developed that incorporate the city's human rights principles and strategies. Gwangju has clearly expressed its vision as a city where various kinds of culture and identity are respected under Article 12 of Gwangju Human Rights Charter. The city has been trying to acknowledge diversity in developing and implementing the human rights mechanisms explained in Part 2. One example of this is the second Human Rights Master Plan choosing migrants as one of its target groups and developing eight policy agendas: setting up a research plan and strategy on various migrant groups, conducting research on these groups successively, multi-cultural sensitisation education on inhabitants, operating programmes to empower migrants' leadership, broadening services to undocumented migrants and refugees, providing assistance to stateless children, activating migrant culture communities and establishing participatory governance for migrants. Twenty-three annual action plans have been developed in line with these policy agendas.

As the city has only been actively establishing human rights mechanisms for around ten years, the city is in the initial stage of realising diversity in society especially for migrants. Korea has been a homogenous nation for a long time and Koreans have relatively low tolerance for migrants. There were 29,131 migrants living in Gwangju in 2015, about 2% of the city's population. In 2018, over 170,000 Koreans signed a petition sent to Blue House (the South Korean presidential residence) calling for around 540 Yemenis who had entered Jeju Island to have their applications for refugee status refused, and over 100,000 Koreans signed a separate petition to Blue House² calling for the abolishment of the Korean Refugee Act enacted in 2013. This conservative culture and limited domestic legal protection towards migrants mean Gwangju is struggling to develop

2. The Blue House is the executive office and official residence of the head of state and government of Korea.

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progressive policies for migrants, especially for undocumented migrant workers and refugees. Develop comprehensive migrant policies based on the principle of human rights remains a major challenge for the city.

IV. Promoting participatory democracy and citizen ownership

Chapter 1 of the Gwangju Human Rights Charter focuses on the “Freely Communicating and Participating City” by assuring citizens’ right to free expression, autonomous administration through participation and cultivation of democratic civic consciousness (Articles 1–3). Collaboration with civil society and concerned parties has been the main approach taken to establish effective human rights administration and policies, particularly for socially marginalised groups. Strengthening participatory democracy and citizen ownership later emerged as major tasks. Gwangju has been strengthening participatory democracy in policymaking and decision-making processes based on the principle of collaborative governance.

Gwangju has been trying to cultivate citizen ownership at community-level in five districts by supporting the community movement. The city introduced the community support ordinance in 2010: by 2013 it was supporting 112 communities, and 600 by the end of 2017. The city established a Community Support Team, which has become a model of good governance, through which city officials closely collaborate with village organisations on planning, budgeting and implementing village projects. As a result, village residents are expanding their self-determination into diverse areas of life including children’s education, the environment and welfare.

Gwangju began its participatory budget system in 2011. Under Mayor Yoon Jang-hyun’s leadership (2014–2018), the city expanded its participatory budget system by introducing the “Gwangju Citizen Participation Budget System” in 2017. Participation in budget execution guarantees the outcome of citizen participation in policymaking. In April 2017, the city appointed 91 participatory budget committee members out of 193 applicants. The city selected members from socially marginalised groups, in addition to financial experts. The age of members varied from 20s to 80s as the city considered age balance, gender balance and residential area balance in a selection process. In this system, citizens can propose public projects and 91 committee members participate in three stages of reviewing, screening and selecting proposals (Gwangju Metropolitan Government, 2017). The city also doubled its participatory budget to 10 billion KW (about \$9 million) per year for 2018 and beyond. This Participatory Budget System helps the city to divert part of the budget’s planning power from the city administration to citizens and to improve the transparency and fairness of the budgeting process. The committee selected 40 of the 632 submitted for 2019. However, the city government faced a challenge from the city council when processing the implementation. The city council cut 23 billion KW from 14 proposals saying that they overlapped or were not urgent. The city council had previously cut the whole budget of 21 out of selected 40 proposals, which amounted to about 50% of participatory budget for year of 2018 (NEWSIS, 2018). Reconciling the Gwangju Citizen Participation Budget System with the budgetary power of the city council is a major challenge.

Gwangju held its first Citizens' Assembly on May 21st 2017, Gwangju Citizens' Day. The planning group consisted of civil experts and organisers who led the entire process of preparing and putting on the assembly with support from the city administration. All Gwangju citizens and civic groups had the right to propose policies. Finally 100 policies proposed by citizen meetings and citizens voted for the most popular ten proposals. Representatives of city hall, the city council, the board of education, and five district offices signed an agreement to implement the policies adopted at the assembly. After then, the city reviewed proposals and accepted 53 out of 100; ten were accepted in their entirety, 22 partially and 21 were already being implemented (Gwangju Dream Daily, 2018). The accepted proposals included the establishment of a youth culture centre, community childcare rooms and the expansion of services to families with three or more children. The Citizens' Assembly was repeated in 2018. The Citizens' Assembly was an experiment in inclusive governance between citizens, civil society groups, city hall and city councils. Consideration should be given to the city legalising for the assembly through city ordinance.

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A successful public consultation on the construction of metro line 2 in 2018 provides a good example of collaborative governance. This issue had been controversial for 16 years. Under the new leadership of Mayor Lee Yong-seop (2018–2022), the city suspended all administrative procedures on the issue and empowered the public consultation committee, which consisted of seven neutral members of civil society, to coordinate all the public consultation procedures. The committee selected 250 civil participants: 125 each from supporting and opposing groups. The committee then conducted a two-day mature consultation. City officials were prohibited from participating in discussion. The construction of metro line 2 received an approval rate of 78.6% and the opposing groups accepted the result. This prevented a social dispute and tested a new decision-making culture in which the minority opinion is also considered.

Gwangju has been helping socially marginalised groups in policy monitoring and implementation. City ordinances require that all of over 100 city committees contain 40% women members. The city also has a separate youth committee to listen to the needs of young people and discuss plans and promote policies to solve them. In 2018, the city also launched a Civic Rights Committee consisting of various civil group representatives which receives and reviews citizen petitions and provides solutions within 100 days.

V. Outcomes and challenges

Under Mayor Kwang Woon-tae's leadership (2010–2014), human rights were institutionalised in Gwangju's city administration to a considerable degree. During his term, Gwangju established a Human Rights Office, unveiled the Gwangju Human Rights Charter, introduced human rights ordinance, 100 human rights indicators, a human rights ombudsmen system and a Human Rights Master Plan. As a result, the city became a leading model of a human rights city compared to other local governments in the country.

Decentralising authority for financial and human resources from central government to local governments is a relevant issue.

However, strong criticism arose that the institutionalisation of human rights itself did not automatically lead to the actual improvement of citizens' rights, especially those of socially marginalised groups. As a response to the criticism, Mayor Yoon Jang-hyun (2014–2018) put more efforts into internalising human rights principles in the city administration and adopted several social inclusion policies. During his term, the city introduced the "24-hour activity support service for disabled people", the Gwangju Wage For Living Ordinance, the so-called "Gwangju Job Model" and the human rights impact assessment, as well as regularising the status of all public sector non-regular workers in the city. Mayor Yoon also took further steps to strengthen participatory democracy and citizens' ownership by significantly expanding support to community activities, strengthening the participatory budget system and holding citizens' assemblies. Current Mayor Lee Yong-seop (2018–2022) took on these policies and conducted the public consultation on the controversial metro line 2 issue and established the Civic Rights Committee. All these efforts were to encourage citizen participation on the decision-making process of city policies.

In my opinion, three key elements make Gwangju a human rights city. First is strong political will as well as a well-designed city philosophy on promoting human rights. All the important achievements were possible due to the strong will of two former mayors. An unchallengeable public consensus to respect human rights, the so-called Gwangju Spirit, has been the basis of this strong political will. An atmosphere has been created that means Gwangju's mayor must respect the Gwangju Spirit and promote human rights regardless of a change of political leadership.

The second element is the establishment of competent Human Rights Office in the city administration. The Human Rights Office must have enough human and financial resources, its status must be sustainable and some staff including the head office must be chosen from civic human rights experts. From the beginning, at least seven years' experience in the human rights field has been a minimum qualification for the director of the Human Rights Office. The Human Rights Office was set up under the direct supervision of the vice administrative mayor and holds the largest human resources of any similar human rights body in Korean local governments. The competent Human Rights Office played a key role in aggressively institutionalising human rights and implementing the relevant human rights policies in the city administration. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea also expressed its view that in order to localise human rights it is important to strengthen human rights departments and human rights civil committees in local governments.

Third, there must be good cooperation with civil society. Representatives of civic groups and academics were invited to participate in the process of institutionalising human rights as well as developing relevant human rights policies. A Civil Committee set up under the human rights ordinance has the power to review the city's human rights policies and programmes and make recommendations to the city administration.

In my experience as the directress of the Human Rights Office at Gwangju City Hall, there were three major challenges in the process of localising human rights. First was the lack of human rights sensibility among city government officers and their reluctance to develop and implement human rights policies. As the institutionalisation of human rights was led by the Human Rights Office during the initial stage, city officers incorrectly assumed that human rights work was exclusively the competence of the Human Rights Office. In fact, all city departments are responsible for making and implementing concrete human rights policies. Different departments sometimes have to abandon their routine work practices and work collaboratively to realise comprehensive human rights policies. Since 2012, Gwangju has been conducting human rights education for city officials to raise their human rights sensibility and to attempt to introduce collaborative work between relevant city departments as well as with civil society.

We need multi-layered international solidarity, including central and local governments and civil societies.

The second challenge is the lack of central government-level human rights legislation and mechanisms. The Korean central government has not yet enacted a human rights basic act that enables it to guarantee a sustainable and comprehensive launch of human rights mechanisms in local governments. Decentralising authority for financial and human resources from central government to local governments is a relevant issue in this context.

Lastly, strong political will among local governments matters again. Institutionalisation of human rights must lead to the establishment of comprehensive and in-depth policies for expanding social inclusion and participatory democracy. Recently, Gwangju has experimented with several new policies to foster diversity in society and empower citizens in the decision-making process but these approaches have not yet taken root in the city administration. A strong political will makes it possible for the city to reach the next level to become a genuine human rights city.

VI. Conclusion

Gwangju has gone a long way towards becoming a human rights city, but much progress remains to be made. I hope the experience of Gwangju will be helpful for local governments that are willing to work towards a human rights city. Lastly, I would like to note that Gwangju has been strengthening international human rights cooperation among local governments. We need multi-layered international solidarity, including central and local governments and civil societies. Since 2011, the city has been holding the World Human Rights Cities Forum in order to share human rights policies and to promote the concept of human rights cities with the participation of city officials and civil society organisations and international organisations at domestic and international level. It is hoped that this network will help to strengthen international solidarity and enhance the rights of people, including the socially marginalised in the public sphere, to make the most of the practical experiences and expertise of all participating cities. Gwangju further plans to establish a secretariat office and launch the Gwangju 2030 Agenda for Human Rights Cities at the 10th WHRCF in 2020.

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