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The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and has the honour to submit, as enclosed, the response of the Government of the Republic of Korea to the joint communication from Special Procedures, dated 15 November 2024 (AL KOR 4/2024).

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) the assurances of its highest consideration.

8 January 2025

Enclosed : as stated



Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Government of the Republic of Korea's Response to the Joint Communication from Special Procedures

(January 8, 2025)

1. Information on the history and current status of the former Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Management Center in Dongducheon

The STD Management Center in Dongducheon operated from 1973 to 1996. Since its closure, the building had been placed under private ownership and neglected for years until the Dongducheon City Government purchased it in February 2023. The site is located in an area designated for the development of a tourist complex project, which aims to revitalize the local economy that has been adversely affected by the relocation of the U.S. military bases.

After the Korean War, 42% (40.63 km²) of Dongducheon's total area was granted for U.S. military use. To date, the U.S. military has handed over 57% (23.31 km²) of the base land to the city; however, the majority of the returned land represents undevelopable mountainous terrain.

The relocation of the U.S. military forces has reduced the number of U.S. military personnel stationed in Dongducheon from 20,000 to 4,000, leading to a steep decline of the once-thriving nearby commercial districts, e.g., Bosan-dong and Saengyeon-dong. This has perpetuated a vicious cycle that consists of population outflows, stagnation in urban development, reduced tax revenue, and high unemployment rates.

In order to boost the local economy through tourism, the Dongducheon City Government purchased the site of the former STD Management Center in 2023 and is implementing the Soyo Mountain Expansion Development Project to enhance tourism infrastructure.

2. Efforts to consult with relevant stakeholders

The Dongducheon City Government has been actively engaged with stakeholders through various channels.

In 2023, surveys were conducted to assess public opinion on the preservation of the former STD Management Center. The first survey, targeting residents living near the STD Management Center, revealed that 90% supported the Soyo Mountain Expansion Development Project. In a second survey with an expanded sample size, 60.4% expressed their support for the plan.

In October 2023, the mayor of Dongducheon held a meeting with the civil society organization [REDACTED], which advocates for the preservation of the building. The meeting was followed by eight rounds of deliberative sessions to discuss the necessity of demolition and explore alternative methods for preserving historical memory.

Meanwhile, in October 2024, approximately 40 civil society organizations, e.g., [REDACTED], in Dongducheon formed a joint countermeasure committee and issued a public statement to voice their opposition to the preservation of the building in response to a delay in the demolition.

3. Efforts to identify alternative ways to preserve historical memory

The Gyeonggi Provincial Government has held separate meetings with both Dongducheon City officials and civil society representatives to gather their opinions and work out an agreement that is acceptable to all sides. The provincial government will continue to put forward a range of measures—including the creation of a digital archive and a commemorative space, the erection of a memorial stone, the installation of signage, etc.—in order to settle differences and move forward.

The Dongducheon City Government intends to continue consultations with civil society organizations to find alternative ways to preserve historical memory, based on the recommendations from a cultural heritage expert's report¹ that, given the poor condition of the former STD Management Center building, call for alternative means of remembrance such as a memorial stone with photographs rather than preservation of the building itself.

4. Corrections to factual inaccuracies in the letter

- 1) The government would like to point to the inaccuracy of the statement that *the Government of the Republic of Korea has not to date taken any legislative or administrative measures to restore the dignity and honor of "Gijichon comfort women"* and highlight the measures implemented to this end.

In 2004, the Republic of Korea legislated the Act on the Prevention of Commercial Sex Acts and Protection, etc. of Victims, and the Act on the Punishment of Arrangement of Commercial Sex Acts to prevent commercial sex acts and help victims of commercial sex acts, including persons in commercial sex acts, reintegrate into the community. Under these acts, concrete policies have been introduced and implemented.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) has taken various measures, including national campaigns for the prevention of commercial sex acts and education for workers in public organizations. Moreover, to protect women involved in commercial sex acts and help them reintegrate into the community regardless of victimization status, the

¹ [REDACTED]

MOGEF, in collaboration with the respective local government offices, has established counseling centers, residential facilities, and Rehabilitation Support Centers, providing extensive support, such as counseling, medical aid, legal assistance for investigation and lawsuits, vocational training, and job programs². Women who engaged in commercial sex work in areas near the US military bases in the past have received the same support through the above facilities.

Gyeonggi Province, independently of the central government, has enacted the Ordinance on Support for Gijichon Victims in Gyeonggi Province, providing quarterly cost of living subsidies to affected women since 2023. It has also implemented various programs to provide medical and legal assistance, caregiving services, and employment opportunities to affected women.

Dongducheon City converted the Saewoom Center, a facility for self-sufficiency of victims of camp town prostitution, into a government-funded facility in 2016. The center provides employment assistance, support for medical and rescue fees, and psychological counseling.

The center also provides a wide array of support programs to ensure victims live alongside the community, including peer support groups for trauma recovery, medical assistance for older female victims, life history documentation programs and funeral services for well-dying.

- 2) The statements that *Between the end of the Korean War until the early 1990s, more than a million Korean women were reportedly forced or decoyed into government-endorsed prostitution for the United States Military and Dongducheon, with up to 7,000 registered "comfort women", was the largest of these zones* are not factually accurate, since there is no official statistical data available to confirm these figures. /END/

² In 2023, 91 centers provided 145,521 services nationwide.