

‘Need to create customized support system through understanding different residence conditions of compatriots residing in Korea’

KIN President Choi Sang-gu: ‘We urgently need to eliminate inequality and restore community for overseas Koreans’

Professor Emeritus Lim Young-sang of the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies served as the moderator of the third session. Song Geum-ju, director of the Diaspora Heritage Division of Incheon Metropolitan City, presented on “The Overseas Korean Welcome Center: A Space of Communication and Exchange for Overseas Koreans”; Joo Sang-hyun, director of the Foreign Resident Division of Gwangju Metropolitan City, on “The Stable Settlement and Social Participation of Koryo Saram”; Choi Sang-gu, president of the Korean International Network (KIN), on “Policy Dialogue for Settlement of Overseas Compatriots in Korea”; and Lim Mi-eun, a teacher at Ansan Seonil Middle School, on the “Current Status of Immigrant Students of Russian Backgrounds and Policy Support Measures.”

Choi Sang-gu drew attention by suggesting that support should also be provided to stateless compatriots. It was argued that stateless compatriots should also include Japanese Korean compatriots as a result of colonial rule, Sakhalin compatriots, compatriots in Russia and the CIS region formed during the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, compatriots adopted overseas who were unable to acquire the citizenship of their countries of residence and children of North Korean defectors born in China (who are not subject to the North Korean Defectors Act).

Stateless compatriots are in an unstable state in their countries of residence, and they should be guaranteed a return to and legal status in their home country. However, they are not subject to the Overseas Koreans Act, so their immigration and legal status are not guaranteed.

Among overseas nationals (with permanent residency status), compatriots who were born overseas but do not have resident registration are Korean citizens but are treated as foreigners when staying in the country. However, their obligations as citizens are applied in the same way as domestic citizens. In addition, it was



Lim Mi-eun (R), a teacher at Ansan Seonil Middle School, presents the “Current Status of Immigrant Students of Russian Backgrounds and Policy Support Measures” in the third session.

pointed out that they are treated unfairly when it comes to health insurance subscription and insurance premium calculation, exclusion from basic livelihood security eligibility, inability to apply for national rental housing, inability to use certain loans and different interest rates when borrowing from banks.

In addition, their child support funds have currently been ruled as unconstitutional by a court, and only compatriots who report they have permanently returned to Korea and have renounced their permanent residency status in other countries can receive the same treatment as Korean nationals. Therefore, considering that there are compatriots who live between their countries of residence and Korea, it is desirable to treat overseas Koreans who have stayed for a certain period of time in the same manner as Korean nationals, he explained.

Choi emphasized that eliminating discrimination against compatriots and restoring the community are urgent issues. The policy so far has been to continuously implement discriminatory policies based on country of origin, which has resulted in a failure to properly embrace 3 million compatriots in communist-sphere countries, such as China and Russia. The enactment of the Overseas Koreans Act itself is a discriminatory policy that differentially treats compatriots. It is necessary to approach compatriots residing in Korea from the perspective of supply and demand for labor and protection of jobs for Korean nationals.

He argued that it is the responsibility of the state to provide relief and restoration for the damages caused by the racial discrimination and human rights violations committed by Japanese colonial rule and to restore the status of overseas compatriots who had to suffer the pain of colonial rule, division, the Korean War and the Cold War with the rest of the Korean Peninsula, and that the return and freedom of movement of compatriots who were cut off from their home country and could not be accepted within the community should be guaranteed. 