

## Volunteering with Koryo compatriots for Lunar New Year at Incheon Senior Citizens Welfare Center

OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk serves meals and washes dishes at Incheon Welfare Center and delivers consolation goods



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (8th from L) cheers with Koryo compatriots at the Yeonsu-gu Senior Citizens' Welfare Center in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, on Jan. 23, ahead of the Lunar New Year volunteer service for the elderly.

On the morning of Jan. 23, OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk joined Koryo compatriots at the Yeonsu-gu Senior Citizens Welfare Center in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, to conduct Lunar New Year volunteer activities for the local elderly.

Together with 15 Koryo compatriots from the youth branch of the Association of Koryo Saram and the Beyond Koryo Youth Volunteer Association (МОБК, Молодежная организация волонтеров Корё-Сарам), which provides support for Koryo-saram, they served food, collected utensils and washed dishes at the welfare center's senior cafeteria. They also delivered rice and other comfort items to the welfare center.

The volunteers ranged in age from a 16-year-old to a 52-year-old. The elderly residents of the welfare center were delighted as the volunteers served meals and washed dishes in fluent Korean.

Hambak Village, located in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, is a symbolic neighborhood with a large Koryo community, with more than 12,000 residents. At Hambak Elementary School, more than half of the students are the next generation of Koryo compatriots.

"Koryo-saram are the descendants of independence fighters,"

said Kim Young-gi, 72, who spoke to reporters after the meal. "The Korean government should take care of them."

Lee Sook-kyung, 77, also expressed her gratitude, saying, "It is a great comfort even just to know that so many people came to visit us in the cold weather."

Seo Gido, 88, who used to be a doctor, also stood out in saying, "I would like to provide free medical support to my Koryo compatriots, including acupuncture treatment."

"As a member of the Republic of Korea, I'm very happy to be able to help the elderly in my community, and I hope to contribute more to the community through this experience," said Kim Sergey, a Koryo compatriot who participated in the volunteer program.

In addition, Ms. Baek Hanna, 22, a second-year student in the media department at Kyung Hee University, who came to Korea from Uzbekistan in 2019, said, "This is my first time volunteering to serve meals to the elderly, and I hope to do more volunteer work in the future."

She added that in addition to receiving a scholarship of merit at the university, she also works part-time as a Russian interpreter to



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-deok (3rd from L) delivers gifts to Choi Ho-young (4th from L), director of the Senior Citizens Welfare Center, at the Yeonsu-gu Senior Citizens Welfare Center in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, on Jan. 23.

# ‘Our Koryo compatriots are valuable assets; helping them settle successfully is a national responsibility,’ says OKA Commissioner Lee

help pay for her education.

“This volunteer service was a meaningful time for us to bring a little comfort and joy to the elderly in the local community,” Commissioner Lee said. “We plan to continue various social contribution activities in the future with our compatriots residing in Korea in order to extend a warm hand to our neighbors.

“It is our national responsibility to support the successful settlement of Koryo-saram in Korea, who are valuable assets to our country,” he said, pledging to work with local governments to help them settle stably.

“Along with their Chinese counterparts, Koryo compatriots are increasingly settling in South Korea,” he said, adding they are playing a vital role in revitalizing the local economy, as well as addressing the depopulation of the region.

Meanwhile, the students from the youth branch of the Association of Koryo Saram and the Beyond Koryo Youth Volunteer Association are working to help the next generation of Koryo compatriots moving to South Korea adjust to life in the country. They are sharing information on how to get an F4 visa, as well as

practical advice on how to apply for college and graduate school.

Not only this, these young people are also participating in various events as volunteers. In the case of the Beyond Korean Youth Volunteer Association, they participated as volunteers in the 105th anniversary of the 3.17 Koryo-saram March Movement and the 7th Koryo Arirang event held last year to honor the Koryo ancestors who fought for Korean independence.

The youth group of the Association of Koryo Saram was founded in September 2023 and already has 189 members, according to Chae Paulina, a third-year student in Hanyang University’s Department of Media and Communication, who serves as the head of the association’s public relations team.

“We are grateful to the OKA for their interest in the Koryo people and for organizing this event,” said Oh Yekaterina, 33, who is the director of education for the Association of Koryo Saram and introduced herself as a third-generation Koryo-saram who came to Korea in 2019. “We will encourage the next generation of Koryo compatriot students to participate in events like this and contribute to Korean society.” 