

‘In their homeland’s embrace after 80 years’: 100 Sakhalin compatriots return to Korea permanently

OKA-Red Cross hold welcome ceremony at Donghae Port on Feb. 9; 270 to be resettled in homeland this year

One hundred compatriots who migrated to Sakhalin due to forced labor during the Japanese occupation were welcomed back to their homeland at the Donghae Port International Passenger Terminal in Gangwon Province on Feb. 9. This year, 270 Sakhalin compatriots will return home permanently, including 100 first-generation compatriots and their descendants, including grandmother Lee Song-gui, who is 100 years old. The remaining 170 will be settled in their homeland through individual entry.

The Overseas Koreans Agency and the Korean Red Cross, which organized the permanent return program, held a group welcome ceremony at the International Passenger Terminal. Byun Chul-hwan, deputy commissioner of the OKA, and Park Eun-young, head of the Korean Red Cross, attended the event to welcome the compatriots to their homeland after more than 80 years.

“I am grateful to the Korean government for allowing me to be buried in my homeland,” said Choi Gunja (92), the oldest Sakhalin compatriot to step onto her homeland’s soil on this day with her daughter, Emontoturi (72). “It’s good to see that my homeland has developed a lot and is clean.”

Choi lost her husband more than 40 years ago and raised three sons and two daughters, supporting them through farming. She plans to live in Busan as her second son came to Korea 10 years ago and settled there.

In addition, Ahn Bok-soon (89), whose hometown is Ulsan, expressed her feelings that “I went to Sakhalin with my parents when I was 9 years old, and it hurts my heart that I am the only one to return here without my parents, whose ardent wish was to be buried in their homeland. I will spend my remaining years in my home village in Ansan.”

Deputy Director General Byun Chul-hwan pledges to ‘do our best for stable settlement’

“The Korean government will always be with you, Sakhalin compatriots, so that your new beginning in the homeland will not be lonely,” Byun said in his welcoming remarks. “We will listen to the voices of Sakhalin compatriots and do our best to help you settle



Choi Gun-ja (92), permanently returning to her homeland in a wheelchair at Donghae Port, is escorted by Byun Chul-hwan, deputy commissioner of the Overseas Koreans Agency, to the arrivals hall on Feb. 9.

down in Korea.”

After the welcome ceremony, the compatriots traveled in five buses to their new homes in Seoul, Busan, Ansan, Incheon and other cities across the country.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Korea Land and Housing Corporation, and other related organizations have also been working together to help Sakhalin compatriots return to Korea permanently, settle down and stabilize their lives. Since 1992, 5,340 Sakhalin compatriots have returned home permanently. Last year, the Special Law on Support for Sakhalin Compatriots was amended to expand the eligibility for the permanent return from one immediate relative to children, so all children of Sakhalin compatriots will be eligible for permanent return this year.

In addition to the permanent return program for Sakhalin compatriots, the OKA is also carrying out various projects, including a homeland visit program for second- and third-generation Sakhalin compatriots, a legal assistance program for permanently returned Sakhalin compatriots and a survey to determine the living conditions of permanently returned Sakhalin compatriots and their accompanying families. 장