

‘We need to compile and educate people on overseas Korean independence movement history to improve domestic awareness’

At a forum on overseas Korean policy issues hosted by Incheon National University (President Park Jong-tae), it was suggested that the history of the independence activism of overseas Koreans should be compiled and used in educational materials to improve the awareness of domestic Koreans.

“This year, which is the 80th anniversary of Korea’s liberation, should be used as a year to change the perception of overseas Koreans,” Kim Yong-pil, CEO of the Dongpo World Newspaper, said in a presentation on the theme of “Understanding Overseas Koreans and Win-Win Solutions” at the forum held on Incheon National University’s Songdo Campus on Feb. 10.

Kim went on to say that leadership in the overseas Korean community needs to be fostered, and that workshops should be held for Korean diaspora organizations to foster leadership and strengthen their capabilities.

He also drew attention with his suggestion to find win-win projects with local residents.

“Together with local governments in Korea, we should find pathways to understand our compatriots and create win-win projects,” he said, recommending that legal amendments be enacted to allow celebrations on World Korean Day (Oct. 5) in areas where large numbers of compatriots are residents.

The forum was attended by more than 150 participants, including Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk, the head of the Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center Kim Young-geun, academics and heads of organizations related to overseas Koreans in Korea.

“We made the decision to cooperate closely with Incheon National University on overseas Korean issues, and today’s forum is the first step and the first fruit,” Lee said. “The OKA’s goal this year is to expand the collective capabilities of the global Korean community, and strengthening the network between overseas Koreans and Korea for mutual development is also the



A lively discussion takes place following a presentation at the Forum on Understanding Overseas Koreans and Policy Issues held at Incheon National University’s Songdo Campus on Feb. 10. (From L to R) Kim Yong-pil, CEO of the Dongpo World Newspaper; Oh Jin-hee, planning and coordination officer of the OKA; Noh Young-don, vice chancellor of Incheon National University; Lee Ki-sung, director of policy at the OKA; Lee Min-ho, Seoul bureau chief of Japan’s One Korea Daily News; and Kim Jae-ki, professor of political science and diplomacy at Chonnam National University.

very reason for the existence of the OKA.

“In the future, as the diaspora grows, various businesses targeting overseas Koreans or overseas Korean studies can be created here in the homeland, and there is a high potential for infinite development. Instead of being centered on the home country, the diaspora and the home country will now be on an equal footing and will join forces to take care of each other globally, just like overseas Chinese and Jewish communities,” he added.

In the first presentation, Oh Jin-hee, the planning and coordination officer of the OKA, presented the major policy achievements since the launch of the agency, including the establishment of a legal and institutional foundation to promote overseas Korean policies, the strengthening of the overseas Korean identity, support for vulnerable compatriots at home and abroad, support for the recovery of economic livelihoods through the network of overseas Korean businessmen and the establishment of an integrated civil service platform.

“As a major task this year, we will promote compatriot policies that contribute to expanding the collective capabilities of the entire Korean community,” Oh said. “We plan to strengthen protection and support for compatriots worthy of our national standing.”

Decorations and honors for independence heroes require cooperation between Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs and OKA

Moderated by Incheon National University Vice Chancellor for External Affairs Noh Young-don, the discussion was attended by Lee Ji-sung, director



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (front row, 6th from L) and Park Jong-tae (7th from L), president of Incheon National University, pose for a photo with participants at the Forum on Understanding Overseas Koreans and Policy Issues on Incheon National University's Songdo Campus on Feb. 10.

of policy at the OKA; Lee Min-ho, the Seoul bureau chief of Japan's One Korea Daily News; and Kim Jae-ki, professor of political science and diplomacy at Chonnam National University.

"The issue of recognizing overseas Koreans requires a shift in thinking," Director Lee said. "We plan to sign an MOU with the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to promote joint cooperation, and we plan to actively promote the first domestic overseas Korean support program with local governments, such as Gwangju, Ansan and Jecheon, to support overseas compatriots residing in Korea."

"The category of overseas Koreans should be viewed as open, not closed," he said. "We should mix bloodlines and nationalities. Currently, the OKA supports Sakhalin compatriots in obtaining Korean citizenship. We are also considering including Koryo and Joseonjok compatriots in the program."

Bureau Chief Lee pointed out that there are 7,285 Korean independence heroes who are still undecorated, around 40 percent of the total number of Korean independence heroes, among whom there are a significant number of overseas Koreans. He pointed out that the issue of unrecognized independence heroes is an ongoing task that the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs is working on with a dedicated staff member, but there is only one person involved, and he argued that if a large number of the unrecognized heroes are overseas Koreans, "The shortest way to solve the problem is to turn it into a collaborative project with the OKA rather than the Ministry of Veterans Affairs handling it alone." The OKA would be able to leverage the network of diaspora organizations and individuals that it has built up over 25 years since its days as the Overseas Koreans Foundation. He suggested that the two organizations should pool their wisdom in conducting joint surveys and investigations.

"Actively identifying the descendants of independence heroes in the Mexico-Cuba region and passing on the honors to them will strengthen their connection to their homeland and give them a sense of pride as Korean descendants," professor Kim said.

"For the descendants of Koreans in Cuba, special measures using local experts are needed to face the special circumstances of Mexico and Cuba,

such as dispersed living, Spanish language barriers, increased localization due to mixed marriages and the deaths of second-generation Koreans who remember their first-generation parents," he added.

Discrepancies in expatriate population statistics are also issue

In particular, the issue of discrepancies in statistics on the number of overseas Koreans was an issue in the discussion.

"Statistics on overseas Koreans are the basis for overseas Korean policies," said OKA Director Lee, adding their reliability is still questionable. "The discrepancies between the statistics of the Korean government and the government of the country of residence and the statistics collected through local diaspora organizations in the country of residence lack objective credibility and hinder the establishment of overseas Korean policies.

"The legal status, rights and scope of overseas Koreans should be more clearly defined," he said. "An objective standard that does not discriminate by country should be established to count the number of overseas compatriots."

In response, professor Kim also emphasized that one of the key tasks of the OKA should be to conduct a census of the Korean diaspora, arguing, "The South Korean government figures show the number of Koreans living in Mexico to be 990, but it is estimated to be 60,000, and in the case of Cuba, the number of Koreans is said to be three, but it is at least 1,000." 장