

‘Compatriots are assets of Republic of Korea and countermeasures against population reduction and rural depopulation’

OKA Commissioner Lee emphasizes ‘support for domestic compatriots’ as new agenda

Summary of OKA commissioner’s opening speech at academic conference

The Overseas Koreans Agency has been supporting overseas Korean organizations and providing overseas Korean language teachers with training programs for visiting their home countries and inviting the next generation of compatriots to visit their home countries for training in order to foster the identity of the Korean people. The new agenda of the OKA will regard the issue of supporting domestic compatriots. It is currently estimated that there are about 1 million of them. Of these, there are about 870,000 Joseonjok (Korean Chinese). However, recently, many Koryo people, especially Koryo people from the CIS region, have been coming to Korea. Currently, over 100,000 Koryo people have settled in Korea, and it is expected that about 100,000 more will come to Korea in the future.

Supporting the stable settlement of domestic compatriots is also becoming a new task for the agency. Another is that the overseas Korean community is growing significantly, and in particular, many businessmen and merchants are emerging. The so-called Hansang is estimated to number over 400,000, including small business owners. The annual sales of overseas Koreans in business alone are estimated to exceed \$100 billion. Establishing a cooperative network that can coexist with these overseas Korean merchants that have grown in size and struggling domestic small and medium-sized enterprises and large corporations is also a major task of the Overseas Koreans Agency. That is why the OKA hosted the 23rd World Korean Business Convention in Atlanta in the U.S. from April 17-20, and achieved great results with contracts worth over \$50 million and local consultations worth nearly \$700 million.

We are currently facing serious issues of the population falling off a cliff and local depopulation. As one of the measures to resolve this issue, we are putting a lot of thought into ensuring that our compatriots who have settled in Korea, especially the Koryo-saram who have been increasing recently, can settle down stably and establish themselves as assets of Korea, as well as contribute to the development of our domestic industries.

In addition, Koryo-saram villages have been formed all over the



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the 14th KAPS Policy Awards Ceremony and academic conference held at the Seoul LW Convention Center in Jungnim-dong, Jung-gu, Seoul, on April 25.

country, including Incheon, Ansan in Gyeonggi Province, Pohang in Gyeongbuk Province, Gwangju metropolitan city and Jecheon in Chungbuk Province. In particular, in some regions, 90 percent of elementary school students are Koryo-saram, and in some cases, Korean students are a minority. Therefore, the long-term policy goal of the OKA is to foster second- and third-generation Koryo descendants and grant permanent residency and citizenship to excellent members of the community so that they can be fostered as assets of the Republic of Korea.

Therefore, I recently visited the Korea Scholarship Foundation and representatives of separate companies, and both emphasized and requested cooperation around fostering excellent students among our second- and third-generation Koreans in CIS regions; overseas adoptees; and those in Southeast Asian regions, such as Lai Dai Han (children born to South Korean fathers and Vietnamese mothers during the Vietnam War) and Kopino (people of mixed Korean and Filipino descent), and ultimately nurturing them as assets for our Republic of Korea, as a countermeasure to the population decline and the extinction of local regions through depopulation. 