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Window into Overseas Koreans



Overseas Korean of the Month - Cuban independence fighter Lim Cheon-taek

Special Article - 2025 Future Leaders Conference

Current Issues & Topics - Commissioner Lee Sang-duk encourages Korean adoptees in France and Hangeul school teachers

'Dedication of padok workers, cornerstone of homeland's modernization'

Special Feature - 120th anniversary of Korean immigration to Mexico: from 'Henequen tears' to 'Viva Corea'





## Korea's new leap onto the global stage

The World Korean Business Convention (WKBC), the largest event for Korean businesspeople around the world, successfully concluded April 20 in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.

During the WKBC, consultations worth up to \$660 million were made, and export contracts worth \$49.9 million were signed. The convention, which began in 2002 and is now in its 23rd year, is evaluated to have greatly contributed to expanding the scope of the Korean economy by providing a link to the motherland for Korean businesspeople working around the world.

In particular, the Atlanta convention was especially meaningful in that it was a place to go beyond creating business opportunities for Korean businesspeople around the world and a place to confirm the new possibilities of the global Korean economic community. As the head of the organization that hosted this conference, I would like to highlight three important scenes from this conference.

The first highlight of this conference is that at the opening ceremony held May 17, this year was declared the first year of the "Establishment of the Global Korean Economic Zone." The Korean Economic Zone is a concept that brings together Korean businesspeople and domestic businesspeople to promote production, consumption, investment, human resource movement and supply chain construction, and is envisioned as a platform to overcome the global economic crisis. It is a concept that Prime Minister Han Duck-soo also presented at last year's conference. In the midst of the recent unstable global economic environment due to trade disputes and protectionism between major powers, the Global Korean Economic Community needs to join forces to overcome the crisis, and the declaration of the first year of the Global Korean Economic Zone can be said to be a timely response to this demand.

Secondly, this event was especially meaningful in that it actively supported the overseas expansion of domestic small and medium-sized enterprises. A total of 391 companies participated in the exhibition, which was organized around fields that are gaining attention in the global market through the Korean Wave, such as K-food, K-beauty and K-bio, and the convention provided opportunities for exchanges with various overseas buyers. Beyond simple exhibitions, 86 business agreements (MOUs) worth \$150 million were signed. We were able to confirm once again that the power of Hansang (global Korean merchants), combined with the



Lee Sang-duk,  
Overseas Koreans Agency  
commissioner

power of the Korean Wave, is an important asset that drives the growth and advancement of our small and medium-sized enterprises.

Lastly, it was noteworthy that this event was held in Georgia, one of our largest investment destinations in the U.S. and a symbol of Korea-U.S. cooperation. At a time when trade pressure from the Trump administration is increasing and a government-level response is urgent, it is a meaningful diplomatic achievement that local and state government officials from both countries gathered together through various G2G (government to government) forums and other events to discuss economic cooperation measures in depth. I believe that this will serve as a cornerstone for navigating the uncertain international trade environment in the future and will further strengthen the Korea-U.S. economic partnership.

The World Korean Business Convention, which began in 2002, is no longer a simple exchange event. It is a platform for creating a global Korean economic community, supporting the global advancement of Korean small and medium-sized enterprises, and a stepping stone for Korea's new leap forward toward the world. The Overseas Koreans Agency will use this event as an opportunity to build a global Korean economic zone and work together with Korean businesspeople around the world to ensure that Korea and the overseas Korean community prosper together. I once again express my deepest respect and gratitude to all the Koreans who have quietly been working hard all over the world. 🇰🇷





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This magazine can also be viewed at <http://webzine.korean.net>

## Cuban independence activist Lim Cheon-taek

**Raised funds for independence and supported provisional government of South Korea, led efforts for national education**

**Published history of Cuban Korean immigrants and their involvement in independence movement, received Order of Merit for National Foundation**

The Overseas Koreans Agency has selected Patriot Lim Cheon-taek (1903-1985), a pioneer of the Korean independence movement in Cuba, as the May 2025 Overseas Korean of the Month.

A first-generation Korean immigrant to Cuba from Mexico, Lim led the Korean independence movement in various areas, including organizing the Cuban branch of the Korean National Association, raising funds for the independence movement, educating young Koreans and making media appearances.

Born in 1903 in Gwangju, Gyeonggi Province, Lim moved to Yucatan, Mexico, with his mother in 1905. In 1921, when the economic situation deteriorated due to the Mexican Revolution, he resettled in Cuba with 300 other Koreans and settled in the Matanzas region of Cuba.

When the Japanese consulate in Cuba demanded that Koreans register as overseas Japanese citizens, Lim founded the Matanzas Regional Association of the Korean National Association in response. Starting as a clerk, he rose to various positions, including secretary, president and adviser, leading the independence movement in Cuba.

### **Named by Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs as October 2024 Independence Activist of the Month**

In 1941, after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, he was one of 11 people representing the three provincial councils of the Korean National Association in Cuba who led the formation of the United Korean Diplomatic Association in Cuba to publicly declare the Korean intention to liberate themselves from the Japanese. Two years later, he launched a more systematic and organized independence movement by launching the United Koreans in Cuba Association.

When Lim received a letter from Dr. Kim Gu that the provisional government was experiencing financial difficulties, he organized Koreans in Cuba to collect one spoonful of rice from each family to fund the independence movement.

From 1937 to 1944, they raised and paid US\$1,289 to the Korean National Association's Central Committee and \$246 to a



Patriot Lim Cheon-taek

Chinese bank in Havana, Cuba, to send to Dr. Kim Gu of the Provisional Government in Chongqing. This was not a small amount of money considering the wages of Koreans in Cuba at the time were only \$2 to \$3 a week.

To support the Gwangju Student Independence Movement in 1929, he organized a support rally with 100 Korean Cubans in 1930 and raised a special donation of \$100 to send to his homeland.

"The 10,000 or so compatriots in the U.S. mainland, Hawaii, Mexico and Cuba were mostly laborers, but their patriotism was intense," Kim wrote in his autobiography about the Cubans' support for independence.

Through people's education and journalistic activities, he worked to establish the national identity of Korean Cuban youth and document the history of Korean immigration and the independence movement in Cuba.

In 1925, he began his career as a teacher at the Minsung



Korean Language School, the first Korean school in Cuba, and served as its principal for many years, teaching Korean language, history and culture to foster national education and the identity of the next generation of Koreans.

In 1930, he rebuilt the Jinsung Korean Language School, which had ceased operations due to financial difficulties, and established a night school, the Youth Academy, to educate young people through reading, lectures and debates, laying the foundation for the next generation of leaders to lead the independence movement.

As a correspondent in Cuba for the Sinhan Minbo for more than a decade beginning in the 1930s, he informed the U.S. and South Korea about the independence movement of the Korean community in Cuba and distributed magazines, such as the Gongbo, published by the Korean Provisional Government, to the Korean community in Cuba to spread international solidarity for Korean independence.

In addition, starting in 1941, he published a series of articles on the 20-year history of the migration of Koreans to Cuba in the Sinhan Minbo, and based on this, he published “Cuban Immigration History” in 1954. This book is the first to systematically document the history of Korean immigration to Cuba and the independence movement, and is regarded as a valuable source for the study of international Korean history today.

In honor of Lim’s contributions, the Korean government awarded him the Order of Merit for National Foundation in 1997, and the Ministry of Veterans Affairs honored him as the October 2024 Independence Activist of the Month.

“Lim Cheon-taek was a patriot who boosted the hope of Korea’s independence from the other side of the world,” Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk said. “We are honoring him as the Overseas Korean of the Month to highlight his lifelong dedication to his country so that future generations can better remember his noble achievements.”

### **Patriot Lim’s granddaughter visits Korea at OKA’s invitation**

To commemorate the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Cuba in February last year, the OKA invited three to four Korean Cubans, including Lim’s granddaughter Nora Lim Alonso, to Korea last December to experience the history and culture of their homeland, including retracing the steps of their ancestors’ independence movement.

In an interview with the media at the time, Alonso recalled her grandfather.

“I knew Korea as my grandfather’s country, but I didn’t really know much about it. I only had the image of a hard life that I



Lim Cheon-taek’s granddaughter Nora Lim Alonso visits the mausoleum of her grandfather, who is buried at Daejeon National Cemetery, during a visit to Korea in December 2024 at the invitation of the Overseas Koreans Agency.

heard from my grandfather, but when I came here, I was surprised to see how much it has developed. My mother is from Spain, so my grandmother taught me how to make kimchi and cook a lot of Korean food, so I grew up eating Korean food.

In particular, my grandfather not only founded and ran a Korean language school in Cuba but also learned Spanish to better fit into what was then a Spanish colony and taught it to the Korean immigrants who came with him. He was also very passionate about educating his children so that they would not forget their Korean roots. My father, Jeronimo Lim (Korean name Lim Eun-jo), served as the Cuban government’s vice minister of industry and food and president of the Korean Association in Cuba, and my aunt, Marta Lim (86), who is still alive, published a book called “Koreans in Cuba” in Spanish and Korean.

### **Lim’s great-grandson receives Korean citizenship**

Lim Penzan Antonio, 28, a great-grandson of Lim Cheon-taek, who is pursuing a master’s program in artificial intelligence (AI) at Chungnam National University, became a South Korean citizen in August last year at a ceremony in which the government awarded him a certificate of citizenship for descendants of independence heroes.

The OKA recognizes and announces the Overseas Korean of the Month for contributing to the development of Korea or raising the profile of Koreans in their country of residence. The agency recognized the late Kim Pyeong-jin (1926-2007), a Korean Japanese businessman who led the development of Jeju Island’s tourism industry, in March and the late Hong Myung-ki (1934-2021), former chairman of the M&L Hong Foundation, who was a generous Korean American donor, in April. 장



## 62 participants from 26 countries complete 2025 Future Leaders Conference

OKA hosts 27th conference this year with aim of building global talent network  
OKA Commissioner Lee to participants: 'You are key players who will lead global network'



Participants take a commemorative photo at the opening ceremony of the 2025 Future Leaders Conference held May 27 at Songdo Convensia in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, under the slogan "Koreans in a Connected World, Taking Greater Leaps."

The 2025 Future Leaders Conference, which aims to foster identity and strengthen capabilities for young Koreans in various occupational sectors, such as politicians, descendants of independence activists and employees of international organizations, has concluded its four-day schedule from May 27-30.

On May 27, the Overseas Koreans Agency held the opening ceremony of the conference at the Premier Ballroom on the 2nd floor of Songdo Convensia in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, with the slogan, "Koreans in a Connected World, Taking Greater Leaps."

This year's conference, which is in its 27th year, was attended by 62 next-generation Korean leaders from 26 countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, China, Russia, Argentina and Germany. These participants are actively working in various fields, such as politics, business, law, medicine and art.

Those who visited Korea included David Kim, who served as political director for Kamala Harris' presidential campaign last year and is the lead on

international partnerships and public relations for the city of Seattle, and Min Olga, a fourth-generation Koryo business analyst and descendant of patriot Lee Gwal (1898-1963), who was the Minister for Foreign Affairs for the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea.

### Various professionals, including politicians, professors, lawyers, participated

In addition, Dr. Song Sol Carola, a doctor and assistant professor of pharmacy at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina; Kang Han-na from a Norwegian financial company, who is fluent in six languages; and Choi Su-ah from the World Food Programme (WFP) Palestine Office in charge of Gaza-related work also came to visit their homeland.

The opening ceremony on this day began with a screening of a topical video, followed by the national anthem, opening remarks by OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk, welcoming remarks by Incheon Mayor Yoo Jeong-bok, congratulatory remarks by Secretary of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee (People Power Party) Kim Geon, World Korean Democratic Conference (Democratic Party of Korea) Senior Vice Chair Lee Ki-heon and World Korean Lawyers Association President Cho Young-hee, a thank-you speech by a representative of the participants (Song





OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk delivers the opening speech at the 2025 Future Leaders Conference.

Sol Carola from Argentina), a commemorative photo session and a welcome dinner.

"I welcome you, the key players who will lead the global network," OKA Commissioner Lee said at the opening ceremony. "I took office as the head of the OKA at the end of July last year. As a former diplomat, I encountered the overseas Korean community while traveling in the 1980s and 1990s. The first-generation immigrants overcame initial difficulties and, as a result of their hard work and dedication, produced excellent juniors like you."

### Commissioner Lee: 'Not foreigners but valuable assets to our country'

"You are not foreigners to the Republic of Korea but valuable assets to our country," Lee said. "You must contribute to your home country and act as collaborators who can lead change. The OKA will sincerely help with these activities."

Mayor Yoo Jeong-bok of Incheon metropolitan city said in his congratulatory remarks: "Incheon is the starting point of the history of overseas Koreans and the base of overseas Koreans' activities as the home of the OKA. I hope that our meeting in Incheon will give rise to new opportunities and hope."

Song Sol Carola, professor of pharmacology at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina, represented the 62 participants by saying: "I am truly honored to be here representing the participants of the conference. We will grow in our respective fields to become future leaders and hope to discuss various topics during this conference while also immersing ourselves more deeply in Korean culture."

### Spreading best practices to strengthen global Korean network

The People Power Party's Kim Geon, the floor leader of the ruling party in the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee, said: "Please become mentors and leaders for all the next generation in the region. This will be a meaningful opportunity to explore the future of the Republic of Korea together and discover and spread the best policies and practices to strengthen the global Korean network."

Following this, the Democratic Party's Lee Ki-heon, senior vice chair of the World Korean Democratic Conference, said, "Please play a role in each country as Korea progresses toward becoming a powerful nation."

Immediately after the opening ceremony, the documentary musical film "Songs of Love from Hawaii," which covers the 120-year history of Korean immigration to Hawaii, was screened.

This film by director Lee Jin-young, which was released in Korea late last year, deals with the lives of early overseas Korean immigrants who left Joseon in 1902 for Hawaii and their descendants. On May 28, the participants exchanged opinions on entering mainstream society and establishing the Korean identity, and presented examples of exemplary activities of local next-generation conferences and affiliated organizations. They also participated in a meeting over tea with the vice chair of the National Assembly and a conversation with the OKA commissioner.

### Discussion on 'role of next generation and strategies for network expansion'

On May 29, the third day of the conference, the topic of "next-generation roles and network expansion" was discussed, and participants took a tour of the National Assembly and watched a performance at Namsan Gugakdang.

Following this on May 30, after a comprehensive discussion and group presentations, the closing ceremony was held, and the next meeting was scheduled.

After the event, regional representatives attended the "Future Leaders Conference Representative Meeting" for two days and one night to discuss the composition of the Global Korean Next Generation Summit.

The Future Leaders Conference has been held annually since 1998, from the days of the Overseas Koreans Foundation, in order to seek ways for the next generation of compatriots to enter mainstream society as Korean leaders and to build a next-generation Korean network. This is the third event held since the establishment of the OKA. Over the years, approximately 1,700 next-generation leaders active in various fields have participated. Last year, regional next-generation conferences were held in four regions: the U.S. (New York, Atlanta), the U.K. (London) and Kazakhstan (Almaty). At each conference, current issues in the local compatriot community were shared, and practical measures to resolve them were discussed. [창]



## ‘I feel like I found the missing piece’

### Professor Song Sol Carola, pharmacologist from Argentina and participant in 2025 Future Leaders Conference

“From the moment I arrived at the airport, it was as if I had found the missing piece again,” Dr. Song Sol Carola (27), a professor of pharmacology at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina, said in an interview with Yonhap News about her feelings while attending the 2025 Future Leaders Conference held at the Songdo Convensia in Incheon from May 27-30. She described the special feeling of the doubly meaningful aspects of visiting Korea for the first time and also meeting with next-generation Korean leaders from around the world. Song, the youngest of the 62 participants, also gave a speech on behalf of the next-generation participants at the opening ceremony of this event.

Song grew up learning Korean traditions at home while living Argentinian culture in public. This background naturally formed a bicultural identity in her and is deeply embedded in her life as a medical professional and educator.

#### ‘My bicultural identity and family have been great strength to me’

“Maintaining a connection with Korea has never been easy, but my bicultural identity, family and the support of the Korean community in Argentina have provided me with great strength,” Song said. “This visit to my home country will be a turning point for me to truly understand and accept my identity as a Korean.”

She added that it was a very meaningful experience to have the opportunity to interact with Korean experts from around the world through this conference, share diverse perspectives and establish a foundation for long-term cooperation.

Song has a wide range of clinical experience, academic research and international exchange experience. She completed her residency in the Department of Cardiology and Department of Gastroenterology at the Cleveland Clinic in the United States and has been actively involved in the global health care field, including volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Dr. Song Sol Carola (27), professor of pharmacology at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina

She presented a clear vision for the government's role in creating the next-generation network.

“The government can strengthen the global Korean network by supporting academic programs, mentoring platforms and medical research collaborations that transcend national borders,” she said. “We live in an era where digital technology allows us to connect with each other anywhere in the world.”

In particular, Song suggested the possibility of cooperation with Korea in the medical field.

“I want to share my clinical knowledge and research experience, participate in health education programs, and support innovation in public health and patient care, especially targeting the Korean community and Latin American communities.

“As a Korean, I feel great pride when I see the global recognition of Korea in the field of health care, its focus on education and its achievement of growth through steady efforts,” she said, adding that cooperation with medical professionals from around the world is the central axis of her life. “The spirit of perseverance and warm consideration is the image of a Korean that I want to practice in my daily life.” 🇰🇷



## ‘I am most proud when K-beauty has positive impact on the world’

Lee Olesya from Uzbekistan, CEO of OLLEE and participant in 2025 Future Leaders Conference

“The need for Korean cosmetics that can be comfortably used in the Central Asian climate led to the creation of OLLEE,” said Olesya Lee, founder and CEO of the Korean skincare brand OLLEE, which she founded in 2020 and named after herself. On May 29, she met with Yonhap News Agency and explained the starting point and philosophy of her brand. She participated in the 2025 Future Leaders Conference and is a female entrepreneur who has successfully established K-beauty in not only her country of residence, Uzbekistan, but also in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. She is gaining attention for her product strategies tailored to the local climate and skin characteristics.

She said that her participation in this year’s conference was particularly meaningful. “The overall atmosphere was very encouraging, and the speakers’ insightful lectures were very inspiring. I was able to gain a lot of useful information, and I want to take a lot of this energy back home. I am deeply grateful to the Overseas Koreans Agency for providing this opportunity.”

### Pride in positive impact of K-beauty on world

Lee emphasized the need for the government’s strategic efforts to strengthen the next-generation Korean network.

“I think the government should actively develop educational programs so that the next-generation Koreans can acquire expertise and practical capabilities in their fields. In addition, it is necessary to provide support for startups in order to create an innovative business ecosystem.”

She expressed her intention to contribute to her homeland based on her professional experience.

“Based on my experience as a startup entrepreneur, I am trying to mentor aspiring entrepreneurs and contribute to enhancing the



Olesya Lee, CEO of OLLEE in Uzbekistan

brand image of the Republic of Korea and revitalizing the economy by expanding my business in domestic and international markets.”

Lee said that she was able to maintain a deep sense of pride in her Korean identity and traditional culture through her grandparents.

“When I see our traditions, culture and beauty industry having a positive impact on the world, that pride grows even more. It is a great joy to share the cultural power of Korea, which combines tradition and innovation, with people around the world.”

She also serves as the head of the charity division of the Koryo-in Business Club and is actively engaged in volunteer work for the elderly in nursing homes and in supporting talented youth in sports to pursue their dreams.

Olesya Lee, CEO of OLLEE in Uzbekistan, is pioneering a new path for K-beauty, focusing on the Central Asian market. She is more than just a businesswoman; she is a K-beauty diplomat who spreads culture and values, and is a bridge connecting her roots in Korea with the rest of the world.

## ‘I want to be face of a Korea that is open to the world’ Choi Soo-ah of World Food Programme (WFP)

There is someone who is leading the way in saving lives in war and disaster sites, and is traveling the world under the name of a Korean. Choi Soo-ah is an international relief expert working for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). She recently finished her work in Ethiopia and was newly assigned to the Gaza Strip in Palestine. She has been working as the hands and feet of the international community in conflict and disaster sites around the world, including emergency relief for Rohingya refugees and response to the Lebanese-Israeli border war.

She briefly returned to Korea to participate in the 2025 Future Leaders Conference.

“I did a working holiday in the U.K. with the intention of finding a way to be happy and traveled the world for two years, and during that process, I met a WFP official, which led me to my current path,” Choi said in an interview with a Yonhap News reporter.

Among the 62 participants in this year’s Future Leaders Conference, she is the only Korean national and said it was a refreshing experience, like breathing “outside air.”

“I felt that my everyday language and worldview were limited within the narrow ecosystem of relief sites and international organizations. That’s why I wanted to meet compatriots from completely different fields and different paths at this conference and mix our worlds. It was a refreshing thought process and an expansion of new perspectives.”

‘Networking starts with whether public square is open’

Meeting the next generation of Koreans from various backgrounds created another layer in her world, and she emphasized that such meetings are the beginning of a network that the government must continuously create.

Regarding the government’s role in building the next-generation network, she said the following: “I think that a network starts with




Choi Soo-ah, an international relief expert working for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)

whether the public square is open. If the government provides a place for continuous meetings, whether large or small, I think that various discussions and collaborations can occur spontaneously according to each person’s needs.”

She believes that her contribution is to open the way for more Korean youth to enter the global society. And she believes that small but meaningful activities of sharing her experiences are the first step.

“There are moments when people approach me without hesitation just by me showing my Korean passport in a foreign country and talk to me about wanting to know more about Korea. The fact that we can quickly become close through stories about K-dramas, K-food and K-beauty is the cultural power of Korea today.”

She says that South Korea has become a country that creates “natural affinity and connection” in the world. “It’s like how friends who are good at singing or have a sense of humor are more popular than friends who are rich and powerful. Korea is that kind of friend right now. As a part of that Korea, I want to create more connections.” 



## ‘It’s time to strengthen next generation of Korean networks that connect the motherland with the world’

**David Kim, director for International Partnerships and Public Affairs in Seattle:  
‘ROK-U.S. alliance is valuable asset that transcends regions and generations’**

“Maintaining a steady network of overseas Korean next-generation members will determine the future. Now is the time to strengthen the next-generation Korean network that connects our home country and the world.”

David Kim, the director for International Partnerships and Public Affairs in Seattle, U.S., who visited Korea to participate in the 2025 Future Leaders Conference, met with reporters May 28 to share his thoughts on participating in the conference.

“It is very meaningful to be able to interact with next-generation leaders from around the world and share diverse perspectives.”

Kim is a second-generation Korean American who has experienced everything from U.S. national policy to regional diplomacy, from U.S. President Barack Obama’s administration and the U.S. State Department to the U.S. Army’s Camp Humphreys in Korea. He is currently in charge of international relations for the city of Seattle and the city council, and has been active at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy and security policy since 2010. He started his career in national security-related work during the Obama administration, and gained experience in education and cultural exchanges, international security and nuclear nonproliferation, and U.S.-Japan relations at the State Department. After that, he studied U.S.-Korea (South and North) relations and nuclear security at the Stimson Center, a U.S. think tank, and was in charge of strategic communications at United States Army Garrison Camp Humphreys from 2019 to 2021.

He also participated in political campaigns, working with major politicians, including Barack Obama (2008) and Kamala Harris.

Kim said the next-generation program should not be a one-time event but that the government should provide institutional support so that the network can continue.

“I recently had a conversation with Washington State Rep. Cindy Ryu, and I heard that she is leading the network of overseas Korean elected officials. If the government makes an effort to support the



David Kim, director for International Partnerships and Public Affairs in Seattle

activation of such networks in the long term, it will be the most strategic resource and a real force that will move the relationship between the two countries.”


He shared his experience of being directly and indirectly involved in the Korea-U.S. relationship, especially at the federal and local levels, and emphasized, “The ROK-U.S. alliance is a valuable asset that should be passed down across regions and generations.”

Kim cited the visit of the Seattle mayor and delegation in 2023 and 2024 to Korea as the most memorable moment that made him feel proud as a Korean.

“It was very meaningful to be able to further strengthen the sister city relationship with Daejeon and share Seattle’s innovative startup culture and technology with key Korean leaders.”

He then introduced the Daejeon Global Business Center, which recently opened in Seattle, as a tangible result of the ongoing partnership between the city government and Daejeon.

Kim said he finds great joy in sharing Korean culture naturally with his friends in his daily life.

“We talk about Korean dramas and food, and we create conversations that transcend national borders. That is the power of culture and network that Korea has today, and I also want to play a bridging role in it.” 

## OKA Commissioner Lee encourages Korean adoptees in France, Hangeul school teachers

**Also meets with heads of major Korean associations in France: ‘I am proud and heartened by efforts to restore identity’**

The Overseas Koreans Agency announced on May 19 that Commissioner Lee Sang-duk traveled to Paris to hold a meeting with adopted Koreans and Hangeul school teachers for the first time overseas to listen to their concerns and encourage them. France is the country with the largest number of adopted Koreans in Europe.

The meeting, held at the Sofitel Hotel in Paris on May 16, was attended by members of the Roots of Korea (Racines Coreennes, Chair Lee Jae-dong) and the Korea Nantes Association (Chair Jeon Heon-joo), the oldest organizations of adopted Koreans in France, and more than 50 adopted Koreans who have entered mainstream French society.

“I am proud and heartened that adopted Koreans are succeeding in their countries of residence, learning the Korean language and culture, and striving to restore their Korean identity,” Lee Sang-duk said in his opening speech, adding that the government is sincerely working to resolve the difficulties of adopted Koreans.

At the meeting, Kim Min-cheol, director of the OKA’s Exchange and Cooperation Division, explained in detail the government’s policy direction for adopted Koreans and the major projects currently underway, and interacted with the participants.

Lee Jae-dong thanked the OKA for organizing the meeting and said that with the support of the agency, the Racines Coreennes will celebrate its 39th anniversary in September with events across France.

“Adoptees feel that Korea is their roots, and they try to promote Korea in their countries of residence,” said Jeon Heon-joo, who introduced the various activities of Korean associations in France, including promoting Korean culture and arts in local areas and organizing gatherings for adopted Koreans.

Adoptees made recommendations to the OKA, such as establishing a scholarship program for the second and third generations to visit their home country and the need to maintain Korean citizenship for the second generation.

In the afternoon of the same day, Lee attended the European Association of Korean Schools (Chair Lee Jang-seok) teacher training, where he encouraged more than 150 field teachers and officials from 64 Hangeul schools in 18 countries across Europe. The teachers gathered in the auditorium applauded the visit and expressed their pride as local teachers who are fulfilling the mission of teaching Hangeul abroad.



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, 7th from L) takes a commemorative photo with more than 150 teachers from 64 Hangeul schools in 18 countries across Europe at the European Association of Korean Schools teacher training on May 16.





OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, sitting, 3rd from L) takes a commemorative photo with participants at the first invitational meeting of overseas adopted Koreans in Paris on May 16.

### Teacher training on theme of ‘Going Global with Roots’

This year’s teacher training program featured a variety of educational programs and was sponsored by the OKA in cooperation with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in France, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, the World Federation of Overseas Korean Traders Associations (World-OKTA), the Korean Women’s Association in France, the Korean Scientists and Engineers Association in France, and the Korean Education Center in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

This year’s training was themed “Going Global with Roots” and focused on providing the latest educational information and specialized lectures to Hangeul school teachers. Professor Kim Taek-soo of Kyung Hee Cyber University spoke on “preparing Korean language classes for the era of AI full-stack and sovereign AI” and professor Han Jeong-hee of Baekseok University spoke on “characteristics of Korean grammar and teaching methods.”

In the breakout discussions, the teachers were divided into kindergarten and elementary classes, middle and high school classes, and adult and multicultural classes to share their teaching practices and concerns, and discuss positive teaching methods. In addition, Lee Min-ho, director of the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, introduced the “Overseas Korean Education Support Project” and suggested future collaborations with Hangeul schools in Europe.

During the training, teachers discussed various topics, such as language teaching methods, cultural experience classes and planning programs for the next generation. In particular, they shared their experiences in adapting to non-face-to-face classes after COVID-19 in order to help them solve practical problems in the classroom. Participants also discussed historical and cultural tours of Paris, teacher-teacher fellowship programs and ways to educate multicultural children.

### Commissioner Lee: ‘Language education is first step to finding Korean roots’

“Language education is the first step in finding the roots of the Korean people,” Commissioner Lee said in his congratulatory remarks. “In the age of

AI, Korean language school education needs to change, and I hope this training will be a practical opportunity for such a transition.”

“It is important to foster creative education methods and a sense of global citizenship that are adapted to the digital environment,” said Moon Seung-hyun, South Korean ambassador to France. “Thanks to the dedication of teachers, the children of European compatriots are finding their roots and identity and growing into proud global citizens.”

In his opening remarks, Lee Jang-seok, president of the European Association of Korean Schools, emphasized: “Even in the age of AI and digitalization, the fundamentals that we must convey to our children remain unchanged. Beyond language education, Hangeul schools are playing a role in conveying the spirit, culture and history of our people.”

In addition, he asked teachers to “learn deeply and gain joy from this training with the attitude of a ‘teacher-educator’ who teaches, learns and grows together.”

On May 15, Commissioner Lee held a meeting with 30 representatives of major overseas Korean organizations in France, where he highly praised the development of the local Korean community and called for strengthening intergenerational communication and active participation of the next generation of compatriots.

The OKA shared that representatives of compatriot organizations asked for a reduction in negative perceptions in Korea of Koreans living abroad, a lowering of the age for multiple citizenship and support for preparations for the 140th anniversary of France-Korea diplomatic relations next year. 🇫🇷🇰🇷





OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, 6th from L) visits the Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen, Germany, on May 17 to listen to and sympathize with padok workers.

## OKA Commissioner: 'Commitment of padok workers, cornerstone of Korea's modernization'

**Visited Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen, Germany**  
**First meeting between Adoptee Association and Korean Association chaired by OKA commissioner**

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk visited Essen and Berlin in Germany on May 17-18 to hold meetings with “padok” workers (workers dispatched to Germany in the 20th century) and overseas compatriots living in Germany. This is the first time the commissioner has visited Germany to communicate directly with compatriots in their locality.

On May 17, Lee visited the Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen and toured the historical records and collections of padok workers on display to reflect on the meaning of their dedication. The hall is considered a space that honors the dedication of padok workers and serves as a cultural center for the Korean community in Germany.

The Padok Miners' Memorial Hall opened in December 2009 and displays various artifacts and

materials, such as the work clothes, helmets, photographs and labor contracts of Korean miners and nurses dispatched to Germany in the 1960s and 70s, bringing their lives and hard work to life for visitors. The museum is also equipped with a large auditorium that can accommodate more than 100 people and facilities for various cultural events.

### First compatriot meeting hosted by OKA commissioner in locality

Commissioner Lee then invited about 50 compatriots from the padok community and the Essen area to the memorial hall for a meeting.

“The dedication and sacrifices of the padok workers laid the foundation for Korea's modernization and economic growth,” Lee said in his greetings. “And I express my deep gratitude and respect for the great role you played through your labor during the difficult times of the Korean homeland and for your significant contributions to the development of the Korean community.”

“The ‘Overseas Korean of the Month’ program is being promoted to ensure that the contributions of compatriots, including padok workers, to their home



country are not forgotten and that their historical contributions are properly recorded and transmitted so that Koreans living in Korea can have a positive perception of their compatriots.”

“The visit of the OKA commissioner is of great significance to the Korean diaspora and shows the interest of the Korean government in our community,” said Jung Myung-kyu, president of the Federation of Korean Associations in Germany. “We hope for the government’s continued interest and support for the Korean community in Germany.”

### Commissioner Lee interacts with padok workers and others

At the meeting, compatriots used the rare opportunity of gathering all together to share their struggles and hopes. The opinions shared included “The nationality restoration process is still complicated,” “Many elderly compatriots are in need of welfare support,” and “The process of applying for subsidies and reporting the results is too difficult.”

The participants offered a variety of opinions and recommendations, including simplifying the nationality restoration process, expanding welfare for padok workers, improving the medical insurance system in Korea for compatriots, simplifying the subsidy application process and improving the process for submitting results reports.

In response, Commissioner Lee said, “I came here to listen to the voices of the field, and we will do our best to improve the systems through an internal review.”

### Meeting with officials from Korean Association of German Adoptees (KAD)

On May 18, Commissioner Lee met with the executives of the Korean Association of German Adoptees (KAD), who are preparing for the “Korean Cultural Event with Adoptees” at the same venue.

“The Korean government is making sincere efforts to resolve the difficulties faced by adoptees in finding their biological parents,” Lee said, expressing empathy for their grievances. He explained the agency’s efforts to establish a dedicated office for adoptees to provide one-stop services for adoptees and to

build a global network of adoptees.

On the same day, Lee traveled to Berlin, where he met with more than 40 compatriots at the South Korean Embassy in Germany.

The compatriots in Berlin recommended improving the application process for youth to study in their native country, expanding support for compatriot organizations overseas and simplifying the process of acquiring multiple citizenships, and also introduced current initiatives of representatives of next-generation organizations and professionals, including building a startup platform and plans to establish a network of Korean doctors in Germany.

### Commissioner Lee: ‘We will endeavor to solve difficulties’

“We will create practical policies to strengthen intergenerational connections and empower young people to become the new driving force of the overseas Korean community,” Lee said. “The OKA will be an open office that reflects ideas from the field.”

The Korean diaspora in Germany currently numbers about 45,000 people. Many of them are made up of first-generation padok workers and their families. Although they left their homeland to make a living, they have not forgotten their Korean roots. This visit to rekindle and connect with them was more than just a passing encouragement.

Even now, there are small Koreas around the world, which are quietly but deeply connected to their homeland. This trip by the OKA was the nation’s first greeting to them and the beginning of a new journey together. 🇰🇷

OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, 5th from L) holds a meeting with Korean compatriots in Berlin, Germany, on May 18 to listen to and encourage the compatriot community.



## From ‘Tearful henequen’ to ‘Viva Corea’

In 1905, 1,031 people took their first steps onto the state of Yucatan just over a month after departing Incheon, Korea

This year marks the 120th anniversary of Korean immigration to Mexico. The 1,031 Koreans who arrived in Mexico in May 1905 spent around four years on the henequen farms before dispersing and putting down roots. Today, more than 30,000 of their descendants live in Mexico.

For Koreans 120 years ago, Mexico was considered a land of opportunity. For our forebears, who were struggling with food scarcity and the chaotic social atmosphere of the late Joseon period, the media advertisements filled with phrases recruiting workers for Mukseoga (墨西哥 - Chinese characters for Mexico) were enough to pique their curiosity.

‘Four-year contract. Free housing. High wages.’

On April 4, 1905, 1,033 Korean immigrants to Mexico boarded the British merchant ship Ilford at Jemulpo Port in Incheon.

After traveling through Yokohama, Japan, the ship docked at the port of Salina Cruz in Oaxaca, Mexico, just over a month later. During that time, two children and one adult died, and one child was born, so 1,031 people took their first steps onto the shore. They were soon traveling by train and ship to the Yucatan port of Progreso, where they were divided into groups of 10 to 25 people and placed at the henequen farms of Merida.

### Diasporic life after four years of farm labor

Henequen is a type of cactus with sharp leaves. It was a component used in rope for ships, which was in high demand at the time. From as early as 4 a.m. until sunset, Koreans would cut the leaves and strip off the fibers in the scorching heat, with temperatures reaching 40 C in the middle of the summer. Their faces were blackened, and their hands often bled from thorns. Historians who have studied the situation agree that the workers had to pay rent and buy their own food.

In an editorial dated July 29, 1905, Hwangsung Newspaper exposed the plight of the Korean people in Mexico with heartbreaking statements, such as, “They wear torn clothes and worn-out straw shoes,” “The image of desolate Korean women reminds one of the plight of cattle, and it is impossible to look at them without tears,” and “It is impossible to stomach the miserable condition of the serfs.”

Even after the contract period ended, the migrants found it



Korean laborers work at a henequen farm in Mexico.

difficult to return to their homeland, which was under Japanese occupation, and most chose to scatter and settle throughout Mexico. Some assimilated by marrying Mexicans. About 270 of the first generation of Korean immigrants went to work on Cuban sugar cane plantations in 1921. They are the ancestors of more than 11,000 Koreans living in Havana and Matanzas today.

### Establishing Hangeul schools and supporting Independence Movement

Korean immigrants in Mexico realized their desire to “not pass on hardships to the next generation” and preserve their identity by establishing Hangeul schools to teach children and raise money for the independence movement and send it to their home country.

According to a report published by the former Agency of Patriots and Veterans Affairs (now the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs), titled “Survey Report on Historic Sites of the Overseas Independence Movement: Mexico, Cuba,” ahead of the expiration of their contracts, Koreans on the Yucatan Peninsula established the Merida Local Committee of the Korean National Congress to campaign for the restoration of national rights. They also established the Sungmu School (崇武學校), a combatant training institution, to train soldiers.

Today, more than 30,000 of their descendants live in Mexico. Although they have localized their appearance and language over





A poster for the documentary "Descendientes" hangs in downtown Mexico City in 2022.

the generations, they still remember their roots by organizing Korean descendant associations and actively enjoying Korean culture.

"The descendants have grown up in a very different country with different traditions," Melissa Mondragon, the director of a 23-minute documentary titled "Descendientes" (Spanish for descendants) in 2022, told Yonhap News Agency. "I have witnessed how the Korean descendants have become a community in Mexico, sharing the grief of their ancestors."

### Third- and fourth-generation descendants active in politics and medicine

Currently, descendants have reached the fifth generation, according to the Korean Descendants Association. Some third- and fourth-generation descendants have served as senators (Nora Yu) and state chief justices (Lisbeth Roy Song). The descendants want to be "remembered" through more diverse interactions with Korean society.

Korean Descendants Association President Marta Kim, a medical doctor in Mexico City who actively participates in various compatriot gatherings and conveys the descendants' wishes, emphasized, "I want us to work together to honor the sacrifices of our ancestors and create a place where we can be more united."


In particular, the descendants would like to see more exchanges between the two countries, especially based on the high level of interest in Korean culture among locals.

According to analytical data from the Korea Creative Content Agency, the Latin American content market is expected to have been growing at an average annual growth rate of 6.63 percent since 2021 for six years, outpacing the global average growth rate of 5.19 percent, with Mexico, in particular, showing a strong willingness to consume Korean culture.

### Riding the 'hallyu' wave, local favorability toward Koreans increases

The Korean Embassy in Mexico has requested the active attention of the Overseas Koreans Agency and the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to facilitate this year's commemoration activities for the 120th anniversary of Korean immigration. The embassy will also begin preparatory work to survey the current status of Korean descendants.

Locally, Merida, Yucatan, which is home to the Korean Immigration History Museum, and Campeche have designated May 4 as Korea Day. The Yucatan state government also celebrates the same day as Korea Day. In 2021, the Mexican Federal Congress declared Korean Immigrant Day, in the first instance of a special national holiday being declared.

In this way, Mexico will mark the 120th anniversary of Korean migration with a yearlong effort to honor the contributions of Koreans and promote exchanges and cooperation with South Korea. 

By Lee Jae-rim, Yonhap News Agency

## OKA Commissioner Lee: 'It is responsibility of government to support domestic settlement of adopted Koreans'

OKA holds first policy meeting to support domestic settlement of adoptees; 60 experts and adopted Korean citizens participate



The first expert policy discussion meeting to seek ways to support the domestic settlement of adoptees is held at the President Hotel in Jung-gu, Seoul, on April 29. Key participants, including OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (6th from L), take a commemorative photo.

The first government-level policy meeting has been held to explore ways to help the 200,000 adopted Koreans around the world settle in Korea.

On April 29, the Overseas Koreans Agency held a meeting at the President Hotel in Jung-gu, Seoul, with government officials and experts from various fields to discuss ways to support adopted people's settlement in Korea. The meeting was held as a follow-up to the opening of the agency's "Dedicated Counseling Center for Adopted Compatriots" in March and was co-organized with the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOAL).

About 60 people participated in the meeting, including OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk, Seodaemun-gu District Mayor Lee Sung-heon, Population and Children Policy Lead at the Ministry of Health and Welfare Kim Sang-hee, National Center for the Rights of the Child (NCRC) Director Jung Ik-joong and Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOAL) Adviser Yoo Jae-hoon, as well as domestic and foreign adopted children and related experts.

"This meeting is meaningful because it is the first step in bringing together adoptive compatriots and government officials," said Lee Sang-duk in his opening remarks. "The OKA will fulfill its role as a networking platform between adoptive compatriots and the government. According to the Basic Act on Overseas Koreans

enacted in 2023, adopted Koreans are legally considered overseas Koreans, and it is the responsibility of the state to support them and help them settle down. The agency will do its best to play a bridge between adopted Koreans and their homeland."

At the meeting, presentations were made on various topics, such as ▲ The NCRC's Family Search Project, ▲ Examples of the OKA's dedicated adoptee window operations and this year's implementation plans for adopted Koreans, ▲ Examples of Seodaemun-gu District Office's multicultural family settlement support cases and ▲ Operational plans of the Korean Adoptee Education Center. The first topic was presented by Director Ahn Jun-han of the NCRC. Ahn introduced various support projects of the NCRC to help overseas adoptees find their biological families and establish their identities. The main project of the NCRC is the adoption information freedom of information request system. Adoptees can request adoption information disclosure from the NCRC and request information about their adoption records and biological parents. Through this, adoptees can find their roots and establish their identity. As a detailed project, it supports DNA registration procedures for unaccompanied adoptees and alternative family search procedures. It was announced that they are conducting publicity and providing information using online





OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk delivers an opening speech at the first expert policy discussion meeting to seek ways to support the domestic settlement of adoptees.

platforms and media and broadcasting media to support adoptees' family search.

The second presentation was given by Kim Chae-young, the head of OKA's Next Generation Compatriots Division. Kim presented on the operation of the dedicated service for adoptees. The dedicated service was opened March 25 for the purpose of providing consultation on domestic and international adoptees' difficulties and concerns, including finding their biological parents and other family members. A total of 119 requests were received over the course of about a month up to April 24, of which 24 were about finding family members, nine were about requesting to view adoption records and add information, and other various requests for information disclosure and DNA registration. Kim shared that the number of inquiries regarding overseas Korean visas (F-4) and whether children can have dual citizenship increased during the month of April.

The announcement that the OKA would conduct a survey on overseas adoptees residing in Korea also attracted attention. The plan is to comprehensively understand the current status and policy needs of overseas adoptees residing in Korea, and use it as basic data for establishing customized settlement support policies.

It was also announced that the World Korean Adoption Convention will be held in Seoul this coming November and that 90 adoptees from around the world will be invited to visit their home country for the first time after adoption. The goal is to foster the identity of adoptees, strengthen solidarity with their home country and build a global network.

The third topic was presented by Do Gyu-ri, director of the Seodaemun-gu District Office Family Center in Seoul, under the title "Support for domestic settlement of adoptee families." The presentation introduced cases of the Seodaemun-gu Office operating Korean language classes divided into basic and advanced classes to support domestic settlement of adoptee families. The office also supports customized job training programs, such as Korean cuisine chef certification courses, to promote social advancement and strengthen self-reliance. In particular, it operates


a whole family support project to ensure stable settlement in the local community, increase capacity of child-rearing skills and improve family relationships. In detail, it introduced cases of operating individual psychological counseling, parenting counseling, family camps and kimchi-making, as well as cultural experience programs for sharing with neighbors.

The fourth topic was a presentation by Kim Oliver, a German adoptee, titled "About the Education Community Center for Overseas Adoptees." He drew attention by arguing that an education community space is necessary to provide various educational services necessary for overseas adoptees to visit and settle in their home countries, as well as to enable communication between overseas adoptees and obtain various materials from their home countries.

He said that if an educational community center for overseas adoptees is established, it will help those who have lost touch with Korean culture and language during their adoption process to visit their homeland or settle and live a stable life, and will be able to provide practical education and information necessary for adoptees to settle in Korea. He also pointed out that there is currently a lack of specialized spaces and educational resources where adoptees can receive basic education on Korean language, Korean history, traditional culture and social systems. Therefore, he emphasized that an education community center for adoptees can help adoptees recover their identity and improve their relationship with Korea, contribute to social integration by forming a healthy community and would hopefully have the effect of allowing adoptees to settle in their home countries stably.

Following the presentations by the four keynote speakers, a panel discussion led by professor Kim Yeon-soo of Baekseok University featured National Assembly Legislative Investigator Jeong Min-jeong, Kosin University professor Kim Hyang-eun and overseas adoptee Amanda Cho, and explored policies to support the domestic settlement of adoptees based on voices from the field.

In the discussion, Jeong focused on the issue of Korean adoptees who have not acquired U.S. citizenship, saying the U.S. government's decision to classify Korean adoptees who have not acquired U.S. citizenship as illegal aliens and deport them from the U.S. is extremely inhumane and humiliating to those who naturally consider the U.S. as their home country. Jeong emphasized that in order to improve the issue of adoptees who have not acquired U.S. citizenship, the Korean government needs to understand the situation and provide legal support so that the 19,000 people who this issue applies to can legally reside in the U.S. and acquire citizenship.

Meanwhile, the OKA also conducted a live YouTube broadcast ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNtVq3D04qw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNtVq3D04qw)) for domestic and international adoptees who could not attend the event. 

## ‘We are one; realizing global Korean economic zone is just the beginning’

### President Lee Kyung-chul discusses achievements and vision of 23rd World Korean Business Convention

The 23rd World Korean Business Convention (WKBC), co-hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency and the Korean American Chamber of Commerce USA in Atlanta from April 17 to 20, has come to a close, being evaluated as the most successful event in the history of the convention. Over the course of four days, a total of US\$660 million in consultations were held, and of these, \$49.9 million in contracts were signed at the event, focusing on K-food and K-beauty products and reaffirming the popularity of Korean Wave products in the United States.

It appears that the strategy of organizing corporate exhibitions specializing in K-bio, K-beauty and K-food, fueled by the global popularity of the Korean Wave, was effective. Recently, as tariff barriers, such as reciprocal tariffs, have increased in the United States, the fact that Korean small and medium-sized enterprises have begun to follow in the footsteps of large corporations to invest in the U.S. market in earnest also drew much attention at this convention. We met in writing with Lee Kyung-chul, the president of the Korean American Chamber of Commerce USA (KACCUSA), which co-hosted this event with the Overseas Koreans Agency.

**We are curious about your thoughts on successfully leading this event, which recorded the most successful results to date.**

I am glad to have contributed to the 23rd WKBC, which marked the “Beginning of the Global Korean Business Economic Zone,” through the collaboration of Korean businesspeople and compatriots from around the world, excellent small and medium-sized enterprises in Korea, local governments and major economic organizations, and I look forward to its future development and achievements. Our members are proud of having contributed to a national event as co-hosts with the OKA.



Key participants attend a congratulatory ceremony at the opening proceedings of the 23rd World Korean Business Convention held in Atlanta, U.S., on April 17. From left to right, KACCUSA President Lee Kyung-chul, North Chungcheong Province Gov. Kim Young-hwan, SMEs and Startups Minister Oh Young-joo, Korea Federation of SMEs President Kim Ki-moon, OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk and Hyundai Motor Co. CEO Sung Kim.

**What did you find particularly impressive about this year's event?**

The highlight of any convention is the results, and at the closing ceremony on April 20, when OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk announced the on-site purchase contract performance of \$49.9 million, local factory contracts of \$45 million, startup investment contracts of \$10 million and consultation amounts of \$660 million, I felt relieved, thinking, this is the best performance ever, with on-site contracts exceeding \$100 million. In fact, I had worried a lot during the preparation process about what to do if the results were not great.

**What was the most important goal of this year's convention?**

First of all, since the convention was held in the U.S., I expected direct results, such as local governments, economic organizations and companies from the U.S. directly interacting and communicating with Korean companies, as well as Korean merchants from around the world, and improving advancements into the U.S. market. The value of the contracts was great, but also many networks were created through programs, such as G2G, B2G, startup competitions, investment meetings and public procurement forums, and I expect more tangible results in the future.





Lee Kyung-chul, president of the Korean American Chamber of Commerce USA (KACCUSA)

### What differentiates this year's event from previous events?

Costs in the U.S. are higher, so it was more expensive than doing it in Korea. However, as Minister of SMEs and Startups Oh Young-joo mentioned 'strengthening the Korea-U.S. alliance' and U.S. Small Business Administration Administrator Kelly Loeffler emphasized, 'joint growth between Korea and the U.S.' in her keynote speech, this event was an opportunity to confirm the progressive, mutual growth between Korea and the U.S. We networked with key economic officials from the U.S. government from 16 states and local governments, economic organizations and companies from Korea, and promised mutual growth between the two countries. Many local U.S. corporate buyers, including purchasing managers from Home Depot and Costco, came, and this was different from when the events have been held in Korea.

### What was the reaction from participating companies?

As the saying goes, 'If you want to catch a tiger, go to the tiger's den.' You need to have a challenging spirit and act courageously to enter the U.S. market. Many people said, 'I'm glad I came to the U.S.' and 'Thank you for providing this great space for us.' Jeonbuk Economic and Trade Promotion Agency Director Yoon Yeo-bong

said that the U.S. market is different in scale and that a solar panel recycling company in Jeonbuk signed a sales contract with a U.S. company to supply products worth \$28 million by the end of June. Based on the experience of the 21st Convention in 2023, I can tell you that tangible results will continue to come out in the future. The Buyer Attraction Committee for this convention will continue to connect participating companies and buyers so that tangible results can be achieved, and we are ready to support and proceed.

### What kind of impact do you think the convention had on companies?

I think this year's convention definitely had a positive impact on the business network expansion and new business opportunities of participating companies. I think it helped with networking and market research for properly developing the vague idea of entering the U.S. market. One of the Gyeongbuk participating companies was preparing a Korean food and makgeolli (rice wine) franchise business, and after meeting a local partner at this competition, they informed us that they would start in earnest. Nature Cell, which is also the top sponsor of this convention, is creating a nationwide sales network in the U.S. I think this convention has been a catalyst and opportunity for business in many ways. The achievements will continue to come in.

### What do you think are the response strategies of Korean American companies in the U.S. amid the changes in the U.S. economy?

With the inauguration of the second Trump administration, Korean companies are facing difficulties in exporting to the U.S. due to the America First policy, high tariffs, supply chain instability, shrinking consumer sentiment and financial uncertainty. KACCUSA is taking a strategic approach, such as supporting supply chain diversification, networks and policymaking that is favorable to Korean companies.

### Please give a message to Korean businesspeople and the next generation of businesspeople in the U.S.

Do not forget your roots and become a person who can contribute to the mutual growth of Korea and the U.S.

### Lastly, please share a message with the OKA and the Korean public.

While hosting this 23rd World Korean Business Convention with the OKA, I realized that the OKA is doing its best for the national interest and the rights of overseas Koreans in its capacity as a government agency of the Republic of Korea, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude. Although we live in different places, we overseas Koreans always have the mindset that 'We are one.' 장

## OKA commissioner delivers lecture on compatriot policy in Vietnam, encourages Korean small business owners

Attended seminar organized by World Assembly of Korean Associations, also visited Korean Town

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk attended the World Assembly of Korean Associations (WAKA) Continental Capacity Building Sessions in Hanoi, Vietnam, on May 1.

At the seminar on May 2, Lee spoke about the core policies and directions of the OKA under the theme of “Overseas Compatriots Policy of Korea and Key Country Examples.” He elaborated on the overseas compatriot policies of major countries, such as Israel, China, Ireland and India, as well as the roles of government and private sector organizations in the management of overseas Korean affairs.

The event, which kicked off May 1, was the first capacity-building seminar for Korean associations overseas organized by WAKA through support from the OKA. The event was attended by the heads of major Vietnamese diaspora organizations, as well as the presidents of Korean Federations in Japan, Asia, the Americas, Europe, Canada, Oceania and Latin America.

“Korean communities around the world are rapidly changing towards third and fourth generations,” Lee said at the opening



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (C) poses for a photo with the continental presidents of WAKA at the World Assembly of Korean Associations Continental Capacity Building Sessions in Hanoi, Vietnam, on May 2.

ceremony on May 1. “It is more important than ever to strengthen the autonomy and capacity of local Korean associations as times change.”

Meanwhile, the commissioner visited Hanoi’s Korean neighborhood of My Dinh, where he toured the sites of Korean small businesses and listened to their issues.

## OKA delivers World Korean Business Convention flag to Incheon, host city of 2026 convention

Commissioner Lee and Mayor Yoo reinforce their resolve to host event successfully at flag handover ceremony on May 22.

The Overseas Koreans Agency handed over the Hansanggi (韓商旗), the symbol of the World Korean Business Convention (WKBC), to Incheon metropolitan city (Mayor Yoo Jung-bok), the host of the 24th convention next year, at the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center on the 30th floor of Buyoung Tower in Songdo, Incheon, Korea, on May 22.

The steering committee of the WKBC decided to select Incheon as the host city for the 2026 event at the 23rd WKBC in Atlanta, U.S., on April 17.

At the handover ceremony, Commissioner Lee Sang-duk and Mayor Yoo Jung-bok congratulated Incheon on its bid to host the 2026 WKBC and strengthened their resolve to make the event a success. The two organizations also agreed to work closely together to prepare for a successful event in the future.

The WKBC is a global event that brings together Korean business



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (R) hands over the flag of the 24th World Korean Business Convention to Incheon Mayor Yoo Jung-bok at the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center in Songdo, Incheon, South Korea, on May 22.

leaders from around the world to explore business opportunities and strengthen connections with their home countries, and has been held annually since 2002.



## MOU between OKA and Sangji University to attract global talent and support settlement of compatriots in Korea

Cooperation on education and research on topics of employment and entrepreneurship in order to overcome low birth rate and aging population

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Lee Sang-duk) signed a business agreement on May 8 with Sangji University (President Sung Kyung-ryoong) in Wonju, Gangwon Province, to attract global talent and stabilize the settlement of overseas Koreans in response to demographic changes facing Korean society, such as the declining birth rate and aging population.

The agreement is aimed at closely cooperating on attracting overseas talent and supporting their settlement in Korea based on cooperation and exchanges in various fields, such as education, research and culture.

The main contents of the agreement include ▲ Sharing information on overseas Korean education programs, research projects and international exchange activities, ▲ Joint development



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (R) poses with Sangji University President Sung Kyung-ryoong after signing the MOU on May 8.

and operation of entrepreneurship, employment and education programs for overseas Koreans, and ▲ Jointly holding conferences and events related to overseas Koreans.

“The capabilities of overseas Koreans are expanding, with 7 million living overseas and 1 million living in Korea,” Lee said at the signing ceremony at Sangji University. “At this time, exchanges and cooperation in fields involving overseas Koreans with Sangji University, which is located in a major regional hub of the overseas Korean community, will create greater synergy.”

Through this agreement, Sangji University will work with the OKA to strengthen its domestic and overseas talent network and build a practical and sustainable support system for overseas Koreans.

## Launch of OKA supporters group Dongpo You

Selection and commendation of 14 young creators working for overseas Koreans and OKA

The Overseas Koreans Agency supporters' group Dongpo You was officially launched May 21 at a ceremony at the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon.

The name of the supporters, Dongpo You, which was chosen through a public contest, means to connect and communicate with overseas Koreans around the world. Through various content, such as videos, photos and articles created by young people from their own perspectives, the supporters will help people understand overseas Koreans and inform them about the policies of the OKA.

A total of 14 young people -- 12 from Korea, one from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and one from Germany -- were selected and appointed as the first batch of supporters. From May to December, they will conduct content creation and promotional activities centered around social media channels, including card news and short-form videos related to overseas Koreans and the OKA.

“We hope that the supporters will tell stories about overseas



Participants cheer at the inauguration ceremony of the first group of OKA supporters on May 21.

Koreans and the OKA with their own sensitivities, passions and perspectives,” said Byun Chul-hwan, deputy commissioner of the OKA, at the launching ceremony, adding that the agency will continue to expand communication with overseas Koreans and Koreans through supporters' activities.



# Korean music legend Chung Soon-mi wins Norwegian hearts

## First overseas Korean to be awarded Order of St. Olav by king of Norway



Korean Norwegian Chung Soon-mi, a music legend, a professor at the Barratt Due Institute of Music and the first Korean to be awarded the prestigious Order of St. Olav

Korean Norwegian musician Chung Soon-mi, a professor at the Barratt Due Institute of Music, has become the first Korean to be awarded the Order of St. Olav by the king of Norway. The ceremony was held in Oslo on May 25 and was an event to honor contributions to Norwegian society and culture and art.

The Order of St. Olav is Norway's most prestigious state honor and is equivalent to a first-class knighthood, awarded to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to society and the state. As a violinist and violist, Chung has contributed to the development of Norwegian music for decades, raising the profile of Korean music.

### Making mark on Norwegian music scene through violin

After enrolling at the Seoul National University's Music Department, Chung studied abroad in France at the age of 17,

where she gained a solid musical foundation. She settled in Norway in 1981, when she married violinist Stephan Barratt-Due, a member of a prestigious Norwegian musical family.

She became a professor at the Barratt-Due Institute of Music, Norway's premier music education institution, where she continues to foster her students. Since making her debut as a soloist with the Norwegian Symphony Orchestra in 1982, she has performed extensively throughout Europe, Asia, South America and the United States, and has been honored with tributes from major Norwegian composers.

In particular, a viola concerto written for her by composer Olav Anton Thommessen was premiered in 1995 at the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra's 75th anniversary concert and caused a great sensation. Chung also made several recordings with her husband, and they appear regularly on Norwegian national television and radio, and are widely recognized as a husband-and-wife artist duo.

### Establishing herself as iconic figure in Korea-Norway cultural exchanges

Chung has also played a leading role in fostering the next generation of musicians and cultural exchange, founding the youth orchestra Young Strings and performing at Norwegian royal events and Nobel Prize celebrations. Her work has been recognized with numerous awards. In addition to the Oslo City Culture Award, the Lindeman Prize and the Arts Council Norway Honorary Award, she was jointly awarded Norway's highest honor, the Anders Jahres Culture Prize, with her husband in 2010.

As a mother of three sons, Chung leads by example both at home and in society, and has become an iconic figure for cultural exchanges between Korea and Norway.

"Beyond being a personal honor for me, this medal is a testament to how deeply rooted Korean culture and music have become in Norwegian society," she said of her award.

Dr. Chung's blossoming on the Norwegian stage with the artistic spirit of Korea will go down in history as a prime example of how culture and music can provide inspiration across borders. 🇳🇴



## Returning to roots, building future through culture; pathways to compatriot solidarity

“A homeland is not just a place; it is a memory, a root, a heart.”

More than 100 years ago, in the Russian province of Primorsky Krai, our ancestors left their homes and took root in an unfamiliar land. Despite losing everything, they held on to one belief: “Our children at least should be educated.” They worked day and night, learning, building communities and finding a role in society, even if it meant giving up their own lives in order to leave better lives for their children.

As a result of their sacrifices, generations of Koryo-in have been recognized for their education and responsible citizenship in every country. Today, Koryo people living in the CIS countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia, are among the most educated, trusted and proud citizens of their respective countries.

They have become active members of their societies and have upheld the honor of their people.

However, in the land they call home, their achievements have not been fully realized. Today, there are more than 110,000 Koryo-in living in South Korea, and the number is growing steadily every year. They have willingly returned to their homeland, but what awaits them is not what they expected. The first barrier they encounter is the language barrier. But that doesn't explain all the difficulties. Differences in culture and mentality, unfamiliarity with the rules of life, lack of understanding of the system and even subtle discriminatory gazes. All of these factors combine to make settlement for Koryo-in difficult.

Although various institutions and organizations are providing Korean language education throughout the country, the real challenge of integration remains. It is not just about learning the language but also understanding and empathizing with the history, culture, social norms and lifestyle of Korean society so that we can become a single “us” living together in this land. Therefore, what is needed now is not just a fragmentary Korean language education but an integrated education that addresses language and culture,



Chae Yae-jin,  
chair of the Koryo-in Global Network  
(KGN)


identity and community.

In this reality, the Koryo-in Global Network (KGN) is more than just a support organization for overseas compatriots. They aim to not only help Koryo immigrants settle in Korea but also to become true partners in helping them become self-reliant, contribute to society and pass on their pride to the next generation. Through a variety of activities, including Korean language education, historical and cultural experiences, life adaptation programs, youth scholarships and global networking, they are laying the foundation for a “society of living together.”

However, there are still institutional barriers. The most prominent is the visa system. Currently, most Koryo compatriots enter and stay in the country on either an H-2 or F-4 visa, but there are clear differences between the two

visas in terms of rights, restrictions and security of stay. In particular, the H-2 visa is limited to blue-collar jobs, and many restrictions on occupation and residency status prevent many Koryo-in from fulfilling their potential. Equal treatment of all Koryo-in, regardless of nationality, education or age, within a unified visa system for compatriots is not just a matter of administrative efficiency; it is a matter of attitude and philosophy in how Korea treats its overseas compatriots.

Settlement is not just an immigration policy. It's about creating a sense of belonging and building a future together. KGN is committed to upholding the very essence of resettlement and sees compatriots not just as people to help but as partners to build a future with. Helping Koryo compatriots regain their roots in this land is also a response to the question of what kind of country Korea wants to be.

Just as a small seed can take root and grow into a large tree, the seeds of understanding and solidarity we plant today will eventually grow into a large tree that will change the future of all of us. And that tree surely will become another hope grown together by the Koryo people and the Republic of Korea. 

\* The contributor's claims or opinions may differ from the position of the Overseas Koreans Agency.



## OKA's Upcoming Events

- May 13: Osaka Expo "Korea Day" official event
- 15: Meeting with heads of major Korean organizations in France
- 16: Opening ceremony of Association for Korean Studies in Europe Training Program / Luncheon for French adopted compatriots
- 17: Dinner meeting with padok workers and Korean compatriots in Germany
- 21: Launching ceremony for Overseas Koreans Agency's supporters group Dongpo You
- 22: Flag presentation ceremony for 2026 World Korean Business Convention in Incheon, Korea
- 27-30: 2025 Future Leaders Conference

## OKA Commissioner's Activities in May

- May 1: Opening of World Assembly of Korean Associations (WAKA) Continental Capacity Building Seminar  
Dinner hosted by OKA commissioner
- 8: MOU signing ceremony between OKA and Sangji University
- 12: 'Korea-Japan Friendship Gathering' to commemorate 60th anniversary of normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan
- 13: Official event of "Korea Day" at Osaka Expo
- 15: Meeting with heads of major overseas Korean organizations in France
- 16: Opening ceremony of Association for Korean Studies in Europe Training Program  
Luncheon with French adopted Korean compatriots
- 17: Dinner meeting with padok workers and compatriots living in Germany
- 18: Dinner meeting with compatriots from Berlin
- 22: Meeting with Shinjuku Korean Merchants Association  
2026 World Korean Business Convention flag handover ceremony
- 27: Opening ceremony of 2025 Future Leaders Conference
- 28: 2025 Future Leaders Conference's 'Dialogue with Overseas Koreans Agency'

## OKA Announcements

### Recruitment for 1st Korean Language Classes and Cultural Experience Program in 2025

Overseas Koreans Welcome Center offers opportunity for free Korean language training and traditional cultural experiences

Customized language and cultural education for overseas Koreans will be held in Incheon this summer.

The Overseas Koreans Welcome Center, part of the Overseas Koreans Agency, announced on May 21 that it will begin recruiting students for the first round of Korean language classes and cultural and experience programs in 2025 on a first-come, first-served basis.

The program is designed not only to improve participants' Korean language skills but also to let them experience the charm of traditional Korean culture. The program is open to all overseas Koreans over the age of 18, and each course is limited to about 15 participants.

The education and experience schedule is as follows. The Korean language classes will run for approximately six weeks, from June 16 to July 25, and the cultural and experiential programs will include a one-day "Hanji wireless light making" experience on June 10 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

All classes will be held offline at the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center (30th floor, Buyeong Songdo Tower) in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, and are completely free of charge. Registration for classes is only available through online application (Google Form), and the application links are as follows: ▲ Register for special Korean language classes: <https://m.site.naver.com/1HQLP>. ▲ Register for cultural and experience programs: <https://m.site.naver.com/1HQNM>.

The application deadline is June 11 for the special Korean language classes and June 4 for the cultural experience program.

"This program is designed to help Koreans visiting Korea become more familiar with the language and culture, and we hope that many overseas Koreans will be interested in participating," an Overseas Koreans Welcome Center official said.

For more information, contact the Overseas Korean Cooperation Division at 032-440-1567~9.



먼저 만나면 더 좋습니다

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재무, 건강, 여가, 대인관계 영역

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