

Mother's Embrace Garden in Paju, a healing space for adoptees, opens after 8 years

Congratulatory remarks by OKA Commissioner Lee: 'Adopted Koreans are valuable human assets'



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk delivers a congratulatory speech at the 2025 Korean Adoptees Peace Festival to mark the opening of the Mother's Embrace Garden in Paju, Gyeonggi Province, on June 14.

Mother's Embrace Garden, a "memory and healing space" for overseas adoptees, officially opened June 14 in Paju, Gyeonggi Province, after more than eight years of preparation. It is a "homecoming" and a "warm embrace" for adoptees who have been missing their homeland.

The 2,224-square-meter garden is a symbolic space that is part of a camp housing site (610,000 square meters) that was once a U.S. military base. It was created in 2017 by the adoptee organization Me & Korea (CEO Kim Min-young) and the city of Paju. Construction, which was suspended due to COVID-19, resumed in 2023, with the unveiling of a mural in November last year ahead of the full opening.

The opening ceremony, which was held as part of the 2025 Korean Adoptee Peace Festival, was attended by about 300 people, comprised of 200 overseas adoptees and 100 residents of Paju.

"Adoptees are important members of the 7 million-strong overseas Korean community around the world and are valuable

human assets," said Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk in his congratulatory remarks. "The OKA recently opened a dedicated window for adoptees in Gwanghwamun, Seoul, and plans to hold the World Korean Adoptee Congress in November to further strengthen the bond between adoptees and their homeland."

The first Korean American general in the U.S. Army, Stephen Curda (Korean name: Choi Gab-san), a professor at National Louis University in the U.S., delivered a greeting on behalf of adoptees. The event also featured a touching scene in which adoptees' birth mothers, foster mothers and adoptive mothers stood on the same podium.

When a birth mother who was separated from her child in 1975 recounted her life of having to give her daughter up for adoption overseas, many of the adoptees were moved to tears as they recalled their own pain and hurt.

A foster mother who has cared for 61 children over the past 19 years and an adoptive mother who visited Korea for the first time with her adopted daughter and grandchildren also took the stage to rapturous applause.

The event also featured an exhibition at the Peace Museum with 900 photos of adoptees, including their names and stories, and a Memory Wall at the edge of the garden with the name tags of 700 adoptees.

The two-day festival, which began June 13, featured folk games, documentary screenings and musical performances. Adoptees and Paju residents played folk games and mingled together, and the Paju Civic Center screened the documentary film "To My Name," which tells the stories of adoptees.

"We expect the festival to be a space of memory and healing for the thousands of adoptees who visit Korea in search of their roots," said Kim Min-young, CEO of Me & Korea, who co-chaired the event. "We hope that the pain of mothers who gave up their children for adoption and the wounds of adoptees who had to leave their families will be healed." 