

## 2026 New Year address by OKA commissioner

Respected 7 million overseas compatriots and fellow citizens, the hopeful Year of the Fire Horse, 2026, has dawned.

We deeply appreciate the interest and support you have shown from all corners of the world over the past year and wish health and happiness to all your households. Now in its third year since its establishment, the Overseas Koreans Agency has begun a comprehensive overhaul of its policies to provide more effective support and strengthen the capabilities of the overseas Korean community.

President Lee Jae Myung has held nine meetings with overseas Koreans in the first six months of his administration to listen directly to the voices from the field.

The communication platform DongpoON broadcast has launched. We have taken over the “Sakhalin Compatriots Permanent Return Project” and integrated the support system, as well as expanded the scope of accompanying family members eligible for permanent return. We have improved remote identity verification for overseas citizens and enhanced access to domestic online services.

Respected overseas compatriots, the new year 2026 will be a year of fundamentally reshaping the compatriot support system and initiating a fundamental transformation of compatriot policies.

First, we will systematically assess the status of overseas compatriots and the challenges requiring resolution, which form the foundation of overseas compatriot policy, and establish a compatriot database. We will revise the Overseas National Registration Act to increase registration rates by simplifying required documents, linking overseas voter registration and introducing a predeparture registration system. We will also introduce a certification system for overseas compatriots holding foreign nationality to enhance convenience in domestic entry/exit procedures and activities within Korea.

Second, we will roll up our sleeves to resolve the long-standing grievances and persistent challenges within the overseas Korean community. To substantively guarantee the right to vote for overseas Koreans, a right that has required traveling hundreds to thousands of kilometers or else has been forfeited, we will push for reforms to the overseas voting system. We will significantly strengthen support for Hangeul schools, which are central to Korean identity education. We will raise the operational cost support rate from the current 30 percent to around 50 percent. We will establish a Korean language education support council involving the OKA, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and others to build a whole-of-government cooperation system. This includes integrated content development and unified management of teacher training programs. We will actively pursue lowering the age limit for dual citizenship. We will also restore dedicated consular officers for overseas Koreans at diplomatic missions in areas with high concentrations of overseas

Koreans to strengthen on-the-ground support.

Third, we will expand support for overseas Korean communities and strengthen their networks. To enhance these networks, we will establish a new World Korean Congress encompassing diverse generations, professions and fields. We will invigorate overseas expansions by domestic companies and domestic investment by overseas Korean businesses while significantly expanding internship opportunities for young Koreans at overseas Korean enterprises. We will also strategically support institutional improvements to protect the rights and interests of overseas Koreans in their countries of residence, as well as their public diplomacy activities. To effectively implement this, we will establish a support system where the government and private organizations share roles.

Fourth, we will establish a support system for the domestic settlement of returning compatriots, strengthening support for the return and settlement of Koryoin, Sakhalin Koreans, adoptees, Koreans in Japan and atomic bomb victims. We will operate integrated programs linking education and employment for young compatriots wishing to return, attracting talented young compatriots. We will integrate the Overseas Korean (F-4) visa and the Visitor Employment (H-2) visa to eliminate discrimination based on residency status and promote inclusive social integration, including support for mutual exchange between compatriots at home and abroad.

Fifth, we will strengthen the control tower function of overseas compatriot policy, enhancing cooperation not only with relevant ministries within the central government but also between the OKA and local governments. We will establish an institutional foundation enabling overseas compatriots to directly participate in policymaking processes by forming an Overseas Compatriot Advisory Committee composed of compatriot experts representing diverse fields, such as economy and trade, diplomacy and peace.

Dear overseas compatriots!

In this era where the standing of our homeland directly reflects the standing of our overseas compatriots, and vice versa, the Republic of Korea and its overseas compatriots are partners and a community of shared destiny, walking together toward peace and prosperity.

Let us walk steadily together toward the day when the lives of 80 million Koreans are connected as one, relying on our tenacious vitality and the strong roots of our shared Korean identity, even amid rough waves.

In this Year of the Red Horse, symbolizing dynamic growth and leaps forward, I sincerely wish you a year where all your aspirations are fulfilled. Happy New Year! 🎉



OKA Commissioner  
Kim Kyung-hyup