

# Welcome Address

Sohn Bong-suk, CKWP Chair

Greetings, everyone! Nice to meet you.  
I'm Sohn Bong-suk, and I'm the chair of the Center for Korean Women & Politics.

I am privileged to announce  
the beginning of this International Conference  
on "Women, Marketization, and Culture in North Korea"  
to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Center.

Today's Conference is also graced by leading experts  
from Korea, the United States, Australia, Poland, and Japan,  
who will lead discussions and give lectures.  
Our event, moreover, is being watched by many around the world  
who share our interest in these topics.  
I am sincerely grateful for your participation,  
and extend the warmest welcome on behalf of those who made this Conference possible.

Had it not been for the current pandemic,  
we would have been able to sit down face to face with one another,  
and share the wisdom and insights from around the globe  
for the peace of the Korean Peninsula.

I strongly hope that we would all overcome these difficult times  
and meet in person in Seoul next year.  
The Center for Korean Women & Politics was established in 1990  
with the mission of mobilizing Korean women,  
marginalized by both politics and policymaking,  
into a formidable political force.  
At the time of its foundation,  
over 98 percent of members in the Korean legislature were men.  
Politics was simply not considered a proper domain of women.  
It was our goal to bring women into politics.

Over the last three decades,  
in addition to researching women's policy and North Korean women,  
our Center has developed a variety of programs for the purpose of training women politicians.  
We organized campaign schools for women candidates,

and held training programs for next-generation women leaders and women aides in the National Assembly.

Many graduates of these courses have gone on to work in various fields of policymaking.

Furthermore, we provide various educational courses on democracy, including those on democratic values and institutions as well as the history and politics of Korean democracy, for young, immigrant and North Korean women.

We have also fought against gender discrimination and inequality by promoting solidarity among women not just in Korea, but also in Asia and the Pacific.

In 1992, with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, we organized the Asian-Pacific Women Political Leadership Conference in Seoul, attended by high-level women politicians and experts from 13 countries, and released the Seoul Declaration to promote women's political participation.

Today, our Center is working with other Korean women's groups to push for the "equal number" amendment of the Korean Constitution. Our demand is that the Constitution be amended to guarantee the equal representation of both women and men.

Furthermore, our Center led the creation of Women's Party, the first-ever political party dedicated to women's issues in Korea. With a feminist agenda, we managed to recruit over 10,000 members to the party online in just 38 days. This enabled us to declare the creation of the party officially on March 8, 2020, and nominate candidates for the 21<sup>st</sup> general elections for April 15. Although we did not win a single seat in the elections, we are working hard to prepare for the local elections to take place two years from now. Kim Eun-ju, Executive Director of our Center, is currently co-chairing Women's Party, having chaired the Party Preparation Committee.

I am proud to comment that, through these diverse activities over the last three decades, our Center has successfully wedged "and" between "women" and "politics," heralding a new political culture that takes women's participation for granted.

Since its foundation in 1990, The Center for Korean Women & Politics has taken interest in North Korean women's issues.

Starting with the publication of our research in a book entitled “The Lives of North Korean Women” in 1991, our Center launched the Society for Research on North Korean Women in 1992, and the One Peace and Two Women Forum in 2010 to promote exchange between South and North Korean women, improve their mutual understanding, and organize their discussion of Korean peace and unification. Operating the Democracy College program over the last eight years, in which South Korean women and North Korean women migrants together study democratic values and institutions, we harnessed North Korean women’s democratic capability and further promoted communication between women.

We have been undertaking our oral research series on the lives of North Korean women for the past six years. Archiving and researching the life stories shared by North Korean women who settled in the South, we increased the public’s knowledge of women’s lives and social change in North Korea, improving understanding of the North Korean society. Today’s Conference is on a continuum with the research and educational activities our Center has been organizing over the last three decades to address women’s issues in North Korea.

My dear guests,  
I must emphasize that North Korea today is undergoing change at an unprecedented pace, in an unexperienced direction.

Marketization is perhaps the one keyword that best captures North Korea’s recent change. It has significantly boosted the economic status of North Korean women, and is now a major impetus behind the country’s social transformation. During these trying times for inter-Korean relations, I believe our attempt to understand North Korea better has a great meaning, and hope today’s Conference would occasion further progress in North Korea research here and abroad.

I genuinely wish that today’s Conference would evolve into an authoritative forum where new perspectives and insights for feminist research on North Korea would flourish.

I would like to extend my gratitude and welcome once again to all of you who have joined this Conference.  
I wish health and happiness on all of you. Thank you.