

Candidature of the Republic of Korea to the Human Rights Council, 2023-2025

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. Introduction

The Republic of Korea firmly upholds the universal value of human rights, envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations, as the centrepiece of its policy goals. Having served faithfully as a member of the Human Rights Council for five terms, the Republic of Korea is strongly committed to promoting and undertaking a human rights-based approach in its priorities, such as the protection and promotion of human rights, especially for those in vulnerable situations, including women and girls; emphasis on the interdependence between peace and security, development, and human rights as mutually reinforcing elements; and the integration of newly emerging issues facing humans and global society at large into the work of the Human Rights Council.

The Republic of Korea underscores the importance of prioritizing human rights in all sectors, especially against the backdrop of new challenges such as climate change, the advancement of digital technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery process. These challenges should be constructively and proactively addressed in the discourse of the Human Rights Council, along with other UN mechanisms in close collaboration with civil society.

The Republic of Korea, based on its experience of achieving democratization and economic development over the last decades, firmly believes that the protection and promotion of human rights should be an integral part of a country's development path. In this regard, the Republic of Korea has been sharing its relevant experiences, knowledge and lessons learned while providing development assistance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Contributions to the Human Rights Council

A. Full Support for and Active Participation in Human Rights Mechanisms

(a) The Republic of Korea has been a member of the Human Rights Council five times since its establishment in 2006, and was most recently elected for the 2020-2022 term. During its tenure, the Republic of Korea has been actively engaged in discussions on major human rights issues, ranging from protecting and promoting vulnerable groups to country-specific human rights issues. In 2016, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office at Geneva was elected President of the Human Rights Council, making significant contributions to discussions on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Council.

(b) The Republic of Korea has been making an effort to play a leading role in dealing with emerging human rights issues, including new and emerging digital technologies and human rights and local government and human rights.

(c) In order to support the participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the Human Rights Council, the Republic of Korea has steadily made contributions to the LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund.

(d) The Republic of Korea extended a standing invitation to all thematic special procedures in 2008. Due to travel constraints on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the special procedures could not visit the Republic of Korea in 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, the Republic of Korea has held candid and constructive dialogue with the special procedures through various channels, including faithful responses to their correspondence. We will continue to cooperate with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council by rendering its full support for their visits.

(e) The Republic of Korea will play an active role in human rights advocacy worldwide by constructively participating in a wide range of discussions, promoting all aspects of human rights, remaining constructively engaged in the activities of the Human Rights Council, and supporting the fulfilment of its mandate and functions.

B. Constructive Engagement in the Universal Periodic Review

(a) The Republic of Korea places great importance on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism and has fully engaged itself in the entire UPR process in good faith. The Republic of Korea underwent the third UPR in an open and constructive manner in 2017.

(b) The government and civil society groups exchanged opinions to review the recommendations from the constructive dialogue in the UPR. The recommendations accepted in the review process are incorporated into the third *National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2018-2022)*.

(c) The Republic of Korea will continue to firmly support the collective efforts of the international community to promote and protect human rights through constructive engagement in the UPR and dialogue with the States under review.

C. Cooperation with Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

(a) The Republic of Korea strongly supports the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and has committed to continuous contributions to OHCHR including the field-based structure in Seoul. It has been working closely with the organization on various issues including new and emerging digital technologies and human rights. The Republic of Korea's financial contributions to OHCHR have increased about sixfold over the last decade. In cooperation with OHCHR, we will continue to advocate gender equality, child protection, democracy, good governance, the rule of law and fundamental human rights and freedom.

3. Contribution to International Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights and the Development of National Human Rights Policies

A. Women's Rights

(a) The Republic of Korea has continued to support and contribute to global efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. We have co-sponsored resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly on the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, especially in vulnerable situations.

(b) As for international cooperation in promoting and protecting women's rights, the Republic of Korea has served as a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, shared its efforts and best practices, and actively participated in discussions on the promotion of gender equality, the protection of women and girls' rights, the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, and the empowerment of women and girls. We have also participated in the Executive Board of UN Women since its establishment in 2010.

(c) In particular, the Republic of Korea has emphasized the "Women, Peace and Security (WPS)" agenda. We launched the "*Action with Women and Peace Initiative*" in 2018 to contribute to international efforts to promote the WPS agenda, including the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. Under this initiative, we embarked on projects to address the particular needs of women and girls in conflict situations and held annual international conferences to discuss issues of critical importance under the WPS agenda. In 2021, the third conference was held in Seoul, under the theme of "Strengthening Women's Roles and Leadership in Building and Sustaining Peace, with the Survivor-centered Approach."

(d) Regarding the WPS agenda, the Republic of Korea has expressed its strong support for the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. In 2021, we established the *third National Action Plan (NAP)* to implement Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and implemented it with a whole-of-government approach.

(e) The Republic of Korea also develops the *Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policy* every five years, as a comprehensive national plan for promoting gender equality. The latest one is the *second Basic Plan 2018-2022*. In addition, the Republic of Korea established the *Plan for Improving Women's Representation in Key Public Sectors 2018-2022* in 2017. We will continue our efforts to increase women's participation in key decision-making processes in the public sector.

(f) In drafting, implementing and evaluating its development cooperation projects, the Republic of Korea has been expanding gender perspectives in policies and projects. The Korea International Cooperation Agency set up the *Mid-Term Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025* with a vision to promote gender equality and women's dignity and is trying to contribute to the empowerment of women and elevation of their status in developing countries. By employing this strategy, the Republic of Korea will contribute to international efforts to promote gender equality and sustainable development, in the spirit of equity and universality of the Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Children's Rights

(a) The Republic of Korea sets an example to the world with its transition from a recipient of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the 1950s to a major donor today. The Republic of Korea is a member of the Executive Board of UNICEF, contributing to UNICEF's policy-making process and projects for children in need. Moreover, the Republic of Korea has held annual bilateral

meetings with UNICEF since 2004 and signed the ROK-UNICEF Framework Agreement in 2009, paving the way for strengthened international cooperation to protect children's rights.

(b) At the national level, the Republic of Korea has strived to promote the rights of children. The Republic of Korea has achieved many accomplishments, including but not limited to: withdrawing the reservation to Article 21 paragraph (a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by legislating a new adoption law and formulating the *Second Master Plan for Child Policy 2020-2024* to minimize the negative impacts of COVID-19 on children. The Republic of Korea is also operating the National Center for the Rights of the Child as an independent monitoring institute under the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

(c) As for child abuse, the Republic of Korea will promote the *Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment, etc. of Child Abuse Crime* enacted in 2014. In order to promote the rights of children, the Republic of Korea prohibited physically disciplining children in 2021, which was one of the observations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea will submit the seventh national reports on the implementation of the CRC in 2024 and continue to make efforts to promote children's rights.

C. Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(a) The Republic of Korea has been committed to putting much effort into upholding the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), actively engaging in CRPD discussion, and focusing on assisting persons with disabilities including during the outbreak of global epidemics. We will consistently ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in the policy-making process and push forward cooperation with various stakeholders to create an inclusive society where persons with disabilities could live independently.

(b) The Republic of Korea views the Optional Protocol to the Convention as a vehicle that will effectively guarantee the implementation of the convention's obligations through the introduction of the petition filing system for individuals and groups. Accordingly, we have improved national institutional frameworks to ratify the Optional Protocol by consolidating domestic ordinances such as the "*Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, Remedy against Infringement of Their Rights, Etc.*" and "*Act on Guarantee of Rights of and Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities*". The ratification of the Optional Protocol is expected to strengthen the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

(c) The Republic of Korea has been implementing the *5th Comprehensive Policy Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2018-2022)*, starting with the first plan in 1998, as a long-term national program to implement the *World Programme of Action (WPA) concerning Disabled Persons*. The Republic of Korea endeavors to improve disability welfare institutions through communicating and cooperating with persons with disabilities and their organizations by abolishing the disability rating system, promoting the enactment of the act on strengthening ensuring rights of persons with disabilities, announcing the roadmap for independent living of de-institutionalized persons with disabilities, and expanding the limit of support to reduce the burden of children with disabilities. The Republic of Korea will actively implement the WPA to fulfill its purpose, through pan-ministerial and

pan-regional cooperation for opportunity equalization, social participation, rehabilitation, and protection of disabilities for persons with disabilities.

D. Rights of Migrants and Refugees

(a) The Republic of Korea has contributed to global efforts for refugee protection since it joined the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2000. In 2016, we joined the UNHCR “20+ million club,” an informal forum for donors who contributed more than 20 million USD to the organization. Moreover, the Republic of Korea has worked closely with the International Organization on Migration (IOM), including supporting the implementation of the *IOM Private Sector Partnership Strategy* and its four year membership in the IOM Council Bureau from the 113th Session (2022) with a coordinating role of IOM Asia Pacific Group.

(b) The Republic of Korea has been carrying out “the pilot refugee resettlement program” since 2015. In addition, the Republic of Korea established the *third Basic Plan for Immigration Policy* and the *third Basic Plan for Multi-cultural Family Policy* for 2018-2022. It will prepare an updated policy when the current version expires.

(c) The Republic of Korea joined the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* and *Global Compact on Refugees* in 2018 and is faithfully implementing the pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019. The achievements were introduced at the High-Level Officials Meeting in 2021.

4. Contribution to Expand the Frontier of Human Rights Issues

A. Local Government and Human Rights

(a) Given its proximity to people and first-hand knowledge of communities, local governments are well-positioned to promote social inclusion and ensure that no one is left behind. Since 2013, the Republic of Korea has led the biennial adoption of the resolution on Local Government and Human Rights to encourage the role of local governments in promoting and protecting human rights. UNHRC Resolution 45/7, adopted at the 45th session of the Human Rights Council in 2020, acknowledges the essential role of local governments in ensuring a human rights-compliant response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local governments are at the forefront of COVID-19 response and recovery, with their capacity to take decisive actions to protect and promote the human rights of their residents. In the margins of the 48th session of the Human Rights Council in 2021, the Republic of Korea, in close cooperation with the core group and OHCHR, held a side event on the Role of Local Government in Ensuring Human Rights in Post-Pandemic Recovery.

(b) The Republic of Korea will continue to make its efforts to seek a more active role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights by leading a follow-up resolution on Local Government and Human Rights at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council in 2022.

B. New and Emerging Digital Technologies and Human Rights

(a) To identify human rights opportunities and challenges stemming from the fourth Industrial Revolution and new and emerging digital technologies, and

explore ways to respond to them, the Republic of Korea led the adoption of a resolution on *New and Emerging Digital Technologies and Human Rights* in the 41st and 47th sessions of the Human Rights Council. The Republic of Korea also has held various side events on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights in cooperation with the OHCHR and various stakeholders including civil society and technology companies, in the margins of the Human Rights Council sessions and the General Assembly starting from 2018.

(b) The Republic of Korea supports the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and has actively participated in discussions on the implementation of the Roadmap as one of the Roundtable 3A/B (Digital Human Rights) champions with the EU, OHCHR, and AccessNow in 2020.

(c) The Republic of Korea will seek to expand the scope of human rights discussions in the Human Rights Council through various fora and resolutions on emerging human rights issues due to the spread of new technologies. The Republic of Korea will keep constructively engage in relevant international discussions, and endeavors to promote a human rights-based approach toward new and emerging digital technologies.

5. Participation in Human Rights Instruments and their Implementation

(a) The Republic of Korea has ratified and implemented the seven fundamental international human rights treaties and Optional Protocols: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

(b) Following its pledges for the Human Rights Council election for the period of 2020-2022, the Republic of Korea withdrew the reservation to Article 25, paragraph (e) of the CRPD in 2021. The Republic of Korea also ratified three International Labour Organization (ILO) fundamental conventions: the Forced Labour Convention (No.29), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No.87), and Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No.98) in 2021. In addition, the Republic of Korea has begun domestic procedures to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and the Optional Protocol of the CRPD.

(c) The Republic of Korea has cooperated and worked closely with human rights treaty bodies through the timely submission of national reports and implementation of concluding observations. We will continue our efforts to cooperate with treaty bodies including through upcoming review procedures and ensure full compliance with the human rights instruments to which the Republic of Korea is a party.

(d) The Republic of Korea will seek to ratify additional human rights instruments and withdraw reservations made to the human rights instruments in line with the recent advancement of human rights in the Republic of Korea,

including legal amendments and institutional developments in a wide array of fields:

- Examining the possibility of accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Considering the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances;
- Considering the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Considering the withdrawal of its reservations to Article 16, paragraph (g) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Considering the ratification of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption;
- Considering the ratification of the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No.105), the last ILO fundamental convention which the Republic of Korea is not a party to.
