

**Presentation**

**By Ms. Enna Park, Minister Counsellor**

**Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations**

**United Nations Headquarters observance of**

**The International Day of Families**

**"Mothers and Families: Challenges in a Changing World."**

**Thursday, 14 May**

**Conference Room 3.**

Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am very much honored to participate in the observance of the International Day of Families as a panelist to make a presentation on the policies and legislation of the Republic of Korea to support families with a focus on motherhood.

The Republic of Korea, as rapidly developed for last three decades, has experienced new shifts in the realm of traditional family values such as taking care of parents by grown children and divisive gender roles within the family. The family pattern has also diversified to include single parent families, unwed mother and child families and multi-culture families (international marriage with migrant woman) which rarely existed several decades ago in our society.

The family has been a core and basic component of our society and should continue to be. People used to find security, support and energizing forces within a family. However, the rapid change of social and economic environments tends to lead to the perception that creating or maintaining a family is costly, leading to postponement of marriage, no marriage at all, marriage but no child or divorce. The birth rate has continued on a downward trend to record 1.16 in 2004, the lowest rate in the world.

It is recognized that behind of this phenomenon, there is increasingly disproportionate burden on women within family. Upon that recognition, the Government of the Republic of Korea has introduced a series of legislative and institutional arrangements to protect motherhood, share the burden and upgrade the quality of family life.

**(new legislations)**

**The Framework Act on the Aging Society with Low Birth Rate** enacted in 2005 urges the government to enhance society's ability to share the burden of childbirth and childcare, while effectively creating an environment in which family life and work can co-exist harmoniously based on the spirit of gender equality.

**The Framework Act on Healthy Family** enacted in 2004, with a view to establishing a comprehensive family-oriented welfare system, also fully recognizes society's responsibilities over childbirth and childcare and to support motherhood protection.

**The Act on Equal Employment and Reconciliation of Work and Family** was enacted in 2008. Maternity protection is further enhanced and Parental Leave System, Reduction of Working Hours for Childcare Scheme were introduced.

The Government has also enacted **“Family-friendly Social Environment Promotion Act”** in 2008.

**(maternity protection)**

- **Maternity Health**

The government is running a nationwide health improvement program for women and children through 144 public health centers in various part of the country. 246 public health centers are currently offering pre-natal and post-natal healthcare and counseling services to pregnant women, and health services to infants. In addition, pregnant women and infants from low income households are provided with regular health check-ups for free of charge for early detection of serious illnesses.

Maternal protection by National Health Insurance has been improved and now covers the costs for natural childbirth as well as pregnant related medical tests and treatment.

- **Maternity leave**

- Paid Maternity Leave for 90 days is guaranteed. The 60 day wage within the 90 day maternity leave period is born by the company. The remaining 30 day wage is paid by the Government. In case of small and medium size businesses, Government provides subsidies to cover the cost of the employer.
- The time for regular maternity medical check up is guaranteed and paid. Employers can not deduct the salary on the ground of time spent on the maternity check up.

- Women employees going through miscarriage after the 16th week of pregnancy are to be offered a special paid leave of absence.
- Spouses can get 3 day parental leave. 3 day leave is relatively short compared with other countries but still significant to recognize the rights and responsibility of the father at the time of giving birth in the Korean society where giving birth is still widely perceived as women's work.

#### **(reconciliation of work and family policy)**

- A working mother or spouse can take “**childcare leave**” up to one year in addition to paid maternity or parental leave.
- As an alternative, workers can take “**reduced working hour scheme**” which allows them to work up to 30 hours less weekly than regular working hours.
- “Childcare leave” and “reduced working hour scheme” can be taken in combination within a one year total period.
- Working women or their spouses with a child of age 3 or less who took childcare leave are given monthly allowance of 500,000 KRW (equivalent to USD 500) by the Government.
- In order to promote childcare leave, “**subsidy for hiring replacement workers**” is given to companies by the Government.

#### **(Childcare Policies and Quality of Childcare Services)**

- The Comprehensive Plan for Improving Childcare Services was devised in 2005 to improve the quality of childcare services and enhance society's ability to share the burden while providing childcare services tailored to working parents. In 2006, the government expanded the scope of companies subject to childcare facility requirements from those with “300 or more

regular women employees” to “300 or more women employees and/or 500 or more general employees.”

- The Evaluation and Certification for Childcare Facilities was introduced in 2004 in order to improve childcare services through quality control. The Korean Childcare Accreditation Council in charge of evaluation and certification works for childcare facilities were also launched.
- The Government of the Republic of Korea provides low interest rate loans to support the construction of workplace childcare facilities and subsidies for renovation, equipment purchase and salaries for nursing teachers and other staff.

#### **(Public Baby-sitting Service)**

The government has introduced public baby-sitting services to working parents to help them meet their urgent or temporary situation such as business traveling or overtime work. Working parents can use this service for a maximum of 120 hours per week per child between 3 months and 12 years old. Low income families pay only 1 dollar per hour while the above average income family pays more, though it is still much modest compared with private baby sitting services. These service centers are located in 65 counties and are expected to be expanded to 232 counties within this year.

Through those supporting measures for safe child birth and sharing burden of childcare, the birth rate has slightly gone up from 1.14 in 2005 to 1.2 in 2008, still less than half of the average birth rate of the world.

#### **(Legislations on Domestic Violence)**

Another important measure to protect mother and family is to actively deal with domestic violence. The December 2002 amendment to the Special Act on Punishment of Domestic Violence changed the objective of the Act from "promoting the recovery of peace and stability in families" to "fostering healthy families and protecting human

rights of victims of domestic violence and family members." This change calls for heightened concern for protecting human rights of victims of domestic violence rather than simply focusing on rebuilding families. The amendment also strengthened measures that public prosecutors can take to prevent the recurrence of domestic violence. At the same time, the amendment strengthened the medical and protection program for victims.

The government has undertaken more stringent prevention and arrest works through frequent patrol and inspection of residential areas during the night time and early morning hours to effectively respond to sexual violence crimes.

Enhanced law enforcement on domestic violence and improved public awareness on the illegality of domestic violence contributed to the lowering of the level of domestic violence crime arrests by 14.4%.

**(Family-friendly social environment and gender-equal family culture)**

The government of the Republic of Korea also recognizes the importance of creating family-friendly social environments and promoting gender-equal family culture

The National Plan for family-friendly social environments is now being developed under the frame of the "Family-friendly Social Environment Promotion Act." Various programs to promote family-friendly working place and family-friendly community are introduced. "Certificate System of Family-friendly Corporations" is one of them. In addition, the Family Friendliness Index survey was also conducted.

83 Healthy Family Support Centers are currently in operation to create family-friendly community environment through implementing concrete programs. The programs of the Center include child care service, after school activities, educational programs for parents, consulting and legal services and special programs to address the specific needs of multi-cultural families.

With respect to gender equality family culture, the national and local governments are striving to promote democratic family culture and values based on gender equality and to achieve fair assessment of the value of domestic labor. The government and relevant agencies are taking various measures to promote family culture based on the notion of gender equality.

**(Conclusion)**

I shared with you the policies of the Republic of Korea to support families, mainly focusing on the protection of motherhood and enhancing social responsibility in care-giving. Mothers are the cornerstone of the family. A healthy family is the corner stone of the society by extension. When mothers are healthy and happy, entire families can be healthy and happy too. There is a huge social responsibility to take care of family and to support mothers. This is a very simple truth. Korea has come a long way to recognize this and now we are making every effort to support family by protecting motherhood and sharing the burden. Yet there is still a long way to go. In particular, for Korean society, we have to actively deal with non-traditional forms of family such as the single parent family, divorced family, remarried family and multi-cultural family. I hope we can effectively provide support to meet their respective needs.

Thank you.

