(near Kyongbokkung and Insa-dong)

of Korean women or women of any country. ●

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Reconciliation without borders

Adopted Koreans pay tribute to President Dae-Jung Kim

Twenty-seven years ago, in one of the famous prison letters to his wife, Dae-Jung Kim brought up the issue of transnational adoption from Korea. While contemplating the moral aspects of intercountry adoption in a time of economic growth and national prosperity, he was equally moved by the existential struggle of the adoptees returning to Korea and ashamed of the nation's reckless abandonment of its sons and daughters.

During the long years in opposition and exile from his own country, Dae-Jung Kim and his wife had many opportunities to meet with individuals and representatives from communities around the world. He was both surprised and stunned by the large number of adopted Koreans he encountered on his travels. In 1989, while visiting Stockholm, Sweden, the adoption issue was brought to his attention during his public speech by the audience and his understanding of the issue deepened during the following years.

On 23 October 1998, as the democratically elected President of the Republic of Korea, he officially apologized on behalf of the nation to a specially invited group of twenty-nine adoptees from eight different countries. The Korean nation, for the first time, officially acknowledged the existence of 200,000 transnationally adopted Koreans.

The following year, Dae-Jung Kim initiated efforts to provide support for returning adoptees that search for their birth families. That resulted in the opening of the semi-governmental organization Global Adoption Information and Post-Service Center. In the spirit of reconciliation, which he was famous for, the organization was supposed to centralize and simplify the steps towards a possible reunion between the Korean adoptee and the Korean birth family.

Over the past decade, more than 90,000 requests for searches have been made. That means roughly half of all the individuals sent for overseas adoption have made an average of at least one official request to find their Korean families, and yet, less than 2.7% of all adoptees have been successfully reunited with their families.

> For us... he symbolizes the very best in Korea: The value of mutual recognition, the respect for human dignity, and an uncompromising fight against injustice.

Today, there exists a unique community of transnationally-adopted Koreans in Seoul. Approximately 500-1,000 overseas adoptees have returned to live in Korea on a more or less permanent basis, while several thousand visit each year. Similar to the 'China Towns' and the 'Korea Towns' in American and European cities, there is a small, but growing 'Adoptee Town' in Seoul.

There are numerous reasons to pay tribute to late President Dae-Jung Kim. For us, for the community of transnationally-adopted Koreans, he symbolizes the very best in Korea: The value of mutual recognition, the respect for human dignity, and an uncompromising fight against injustice.

But more than anything, Dae-Jung Kim was the first representative of the Korean people to officially acknowledge our existence, our suffering, and our lifelong struggle to end our exile. He was the first to acknowledge that we are, we were, and we will remain Korean. We therefore, with the greatest respect, pay our tribute to former President Dae-Jung Kim and his vision of reconciliation without borders. ●

Signed:
Kim Su Rasmussen, Tobias Hubinette, Kelsey Hye-Sun March, Nicole Sheppard, Malena Swanson, Hanna Sofia Jung Johansson, Korean @doptees Worldwide, TRACK, Heidi Borg Jørgensen, Lena Kim Arctaedius, (AKF - Association Korean Adoptees in Sweden), Jan Lee Hoejmark-Jensen, Denis SungHo Janssens, Maya Weimer, Christiane Baudraz, Kimchi Association, Lars Liebing, G.O.A'L, Eli Park Sørensen, Nadine Allemann, Mads Jung Nielsen, St. Olaf College, Ross Lee Schreck, Vore Studios, Valérie Burnet, Asamco Association, United Adoptees International (UAI) Netherlands.

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