

## Introduction

**H**UMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND EDUCATION grows in supportive political, legal, social and cultural environments. In environments that tend to negate the existence of human rights, human rights promotion and education creatively assumes different names and forms. In this case, the essential content remains the same: the value of human rights for everyone.

The debate in Seoul city on an ordinance on student rights illustrates the issue of political perspectives negatively affecting support for human rights.

The Seoul Metropolitan Council enacted the Seoul Student Rights Ordinance in 2012. But questions were raised about it subsequently, as reported in *The Korea Herald*:<sup>1</sup>

First introduced in 2012, the Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance guarantees the dignity, value, freedoms and basic rights of students. Similar ordinances are also in place in Gyeonggi Province, Gwangju, North Jeolla Province, South Chungcheong Province, Incheon and Jeju Island.

Courts have previously recognized the ordinance's legitimacy. In 2018 and 2019, the Seoul District Administrative Court and the Constitutional Court both ruled in favor of retaining the law, acknowledging its role in "limiting discriminatory hate speech, fostering righteous values as a democratic citizen and nurturing human rights perceptions."

The ordinance, however, has become the focal point of a heated ideological clash, with conservatives claiming it excessively protects students, limits teachers' authority and supports sexual minorities in schools.

Controversy intensified after the 2023 suicide death of a teacher at Seoul's Seoi Elementary School ignited calls to better protect teachers, who complained that the ordinance's protections left them open to abuse.

The Seoul Metropolitan Council enacted in 2024 a bill to repeal the 2012 Seoul Student Rights Ordinance. But the Supreme Court of Korea issued an order stopping its implementation. Then in mid-November 2025, a “nearly identical bill” was filed based on “a civilian-initiated bill.” On the other hand, the issue of constitutionality of the 2024 repeal ordinance is still to be determined by the court.<sup>2</sup>

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) through its Chairperson (Ahn Chang-ho) expressed concern over this renewed effort to repeal the ordinance:<sup>3</sup>

Schools are places where children and adolescents learn human rights sensitivity and attitudes of mutual respect, and where they are guided to grow into responsible citizens of a democratic society. The Student Rights Ordinance can serve as a means to foster rights-respecting schools. Moreover, students’ rights and teachers’ rights are not incompatible. Students’ rights must be maximally protected and respected, and to this end, teachers’ authority in educational activities must also be fully guaranteed.

The NHRCK supports the view that the rights of students are not against the rights of teachers. This issue of recognizing the rights of children has continued in other countries as well.

National and local laws affect the realization of human rights. Legal support for human rights is essential; conversely, laws can restrict or limit human rights. In this latter case, human rights promotion and education would be equally restricted or limited.

This volume presents human rights promotion and education experiences on implementing relevant laws on rights and also at advocating for laws that recognize rights. It likewise presents human rights promotion and education in the form of art (dances and songs), online film collection and film showing, training for specific professions and sectors, local government initiatives, formal education courses and new international education initiative (Global Citizenship Education).

Many of the articles discuss challenges (social, cultural and legal) that could have hindered the programs involved either from starting them or from continuing them after years of implementation.

Two articles from Japan dwell on the importance of religious communities’ support for human rights in view of their role in society not only in

spiritual sense but also in their involvement in education. Two articles (one from Japan and another from Indonesia) discuss the importance of integrating human rights in the study of law in the Faculties of Law to make human rights become an essential component of the practice or use of law in society. In the same manner, the study of law in relation to human rights is necessary to enable people to assert their rights as shown in the programs in India, Nepal and Pakistan, and for journalists in Pakistan to protect their profession in accordance with the law.

An article from Japan provides an example of a focused advocacy on the protection of the rights of people with mental disabilities in relation to medical treatment, and the need for local human rights centers for this purpose. Examples of local government support for human rights education in Japan and South Korea are taken up in three articles. The articles provide concrete examples of activities being undertaken to promote human rights in response to local conditions.

At the Asian level, two articles discuss the value of using films on social issues to promote human rights and the importance of training teachers and education officials on a relatively new idea of Global Citizenship Education which has human rights component.

Finally, an article on documenting experiences in human rights promotion and education points to the richness of the Asia-Pacific region in this field. By stressing the exposure of the realities of human rights promotion and education, valuable lessons to learn and challenges to face are given appropriate space for discussion.

This final volume of the *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* continues the work of HURIGHTS OSAKA on promoting human rights in the region.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lee Seung-ku, Row resurfaces over conservative-controlled city council's push to scrap student rights ordinance, *The Korea Herald*, [www.koreaherald.com/article/10618703](http://www.koreaherald.com/article/10618703).

<sup>2</sup> Lee, *ibid.* Lee also reported on another bill that affects the education of students:

In late October, another People Power Party council member introduced an amendment allowing private academies in the capital city to operate until midnight. Current rules allow operation from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The Ministry of Education also expressed concerns.

“Considering the effects this amendment would have on the right to study, education equity, the bill’s legislative objective to limit study hours and on the private education of Seoul, the 10 p.m. limits should be maintained,” the ministry said.

<sup>3</sup> All School Members’ Rights Must Be Protected in Balance, NHRCK Chairperson’s Statement Regarding the Seoul Metropolitan Council’s Move to Repeal the Student Rights Ordinance, [www.humanrights.go.kr/eng/board/read?boardManagementNo=7003&boardNo=7611632&searchCategory=&page=1&searchType=&searchWord=&menuLevel=2&menuNo=114](http://www.humanrights.go.kr/eng/board/read?boardManagementNo=7003&boardNo=7611632&searchCategory=&page=1&searchType=&searchWord=&menuLevel=2&menuNo=114).