

Human Rights and Democracy Internship Opportunity

May 18 Memorial Foundation

THE MAY 18 MEMORIAL FOUNDATION (Foundation), a Korea-based organization, was founded by the citizens of Gwangju City (located in the southwest region of the country), sympathetic Koreans living overseas, and other individuals who believe that it is important to keep the ideas and memories of the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising¹ alive. The main work of the Foundation involves research, education, cultural events, and international solidarity and exchange with other Asians striving to achieve genuine democracy in their own countries. In this spirit of commemoration, hope and solidarity, the Foundation takes on two interns working on human rights and democracy issues in Asia for a period of ten months every year. It is now on its fifth annual international internship program.

Internship Program

The international internship program was launched in 2005 in order to give interns a chance to learn about and experience the history and development of democracy and human rights in South Korea. Today the program aims to contribute to the development of democracy and human rights throughout Asia by recruiting two interns who have been working for human rights

and peace organizations in their own countries. Specifically, the aims of the program are:

- 1) To improve international solidarity and networking, and
- 2) To promote Gwangju City as Asia's Hub for the Human Rights Movement.

The Applicants

Internship applicants should be university graduates not more than thirty years of age, a minimum of three years of non-governmental organization (NGO) or social development work experience, though not necessarily in the field of human rights. Preference is given to those with degrees in human-rights-related subjects such as social sciences and communication, and those who have specialized in human rights issues within these disciplines. Applicants must be computer literate (email/internet, web page, lay-out/design, etc.) and proficient in English; working knowledge of Korean is an advantage. In addition, applicants should be working members of an organization: applicants cannot apply as individuals without the knowledge/support/recommendation of their current organization. Potential interns should be able to fully commit to living in Korea for the duration of the internship (ten months) and be dedicated to the goals of the internship program.

Since its inception in 2005, fifteen interns from across Asia have participated in the program. International interns typically work for organizations promoting human rights and democracy in their respective countries. For example, Gregoria Barbarica Kristina Ritasari, or Ria, interned with the Foundation in 2008 and has now returned to her role as program coordinator of Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa Foundation (SNB or Homeland Solidarity), an Indonesian NGO working with victims of racial discrimination and their families. Ria enjoyed her time working with the Culture and Solidarity Team and other staff of the Foundation and thanks it for having changed many of her views and her perspective in life. Thet Din also interned with the Foundation in 2008. In 2007 Thet Din was selected by Khmer Youth Association for a Youth Partners in Development Program (YPD 2007). Following his internship, Din expressed his appreciation to the Foundation for the opportunity to work with the Foundation team. He hopes that one day he can pay back all the kind favors he received during his time in Korea, particularly to the citizens of Gwangju City.

Activities and their Implementation

The relationship between the Foundation and the intern is one of mutual benefit. Interns are expected to actively engage in the realization of the goals and activities of the Foundation, specifically, the commemoration and promotion of the spirit of the Gwangju Uprising and of human rights, peace and democracy in Asia. As staff of the Culture and Solidarity Team, interns work on a diverse range of projects and events at both the national and international levels. For their part, the interns benefit by gaining a wealth of knowledge and experience and are able to develop their skills in the areas of organization, presentation and event management as well as networking and campaign strategy.

The following are some of the activities and projects undertaken by the international interns in 2009:

a. The Gwangju Prize for Human Rights

The Gwangju Prize for Human Rights (GPHR) was established in 1999 to celebrate the spirit of the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising by recognizing individuals, groups and institutions in Korea and abroad that have contributed to the promotion and development of human rights, democracy and peace through their work. As international staff on the Culture and Solidarity Team, the interns are required to work closely with a team of specialists to produce detailed summaries and evaluations for each prize nominee. This task involves extensive contact and communication with nominators, referees and other individuals including activists, academic professionals and members of the media.

b. The Gwangju International Peace Forum

The Gwangju International Peace Forum (GIPF) is one of the most important events in the interns' year. The GIPF takes place in May each year in memory of the brave citizens of Gwangju City who lost their lives and loved ones in defence of their democratic rights in the 18 May 1980 Uprising. Today, the Gwangju International Peace Forum aims to strengthen international solidarity between domestic and foreign activists working for democracy, human rights and peace. The Forum consists of several workshop streams organized by various organizations working in related fields. In addition, participants are invited to take part in the annual commemorative

ceremony of the Gwangju Uprising and in the lively festival held in downtown Gwangju City in celebration of the spirit of democracy. In May 2009 the international interns played a vital role in the preparation, organization and realization of the Forum. Working closely with Korean staff and volunteers, interns were responsible for effectively communicating instructions and other information to delegates and for managing transportation, accommodation, workshop coordination and other practical arrangements.

c. Grant for Democracy and Human Rights Projects in Asia

The Grant for Democracy and Human Rights Projects in Asia (GDHRPA) supports work that contributes to promoting democracy and human rights and the building of international solidarity. Each year a number of grants are awarded to NGOs in Asia working for people's empowerment and the creation of a civil society which respects human rights and protects peace and democracy. International interns are responsible for processing grant project proposals and for evaluating these proposals according to the GDHRPA criteria. In 2009 the Foundation received an unprecedented number of proposals, each one was processed and evaluated by the interns before being submitted to the selection committee.

d. The Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School

This is another huge event in the interns' year. The Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School aims to contribute to the development of democracy and human rights throughout Asia by inviting human rights and peace activists from all over Asia to learn and experience the history and development of human rights and democracy in South Korea. Since its inception in 2004 the program has benefited more than a hundred human rights and NGO activists in Asia. Interns are involved in every aspect of the Folk School program, from participant selection and program design, to evaluation and feedback sessions following the event. The international interns maintain direct contact with participants throughout the program: they are the first port-of-call for participants with queries or problems and are responsible for the successful implementation of the entire program, including lectures, workshops, tours, and visits to Korean NGOs in Gwangju City and Seoul.

In addition to the above, interns may also have the opportunity to participate in the following activities:

a. May 18 Culture Festival for Youth: RED FESTA

This festival aims to provide an opportunity for young people to organize and participate in the cultural experience of the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising. The event is growing in popularity and getting bigger every year. Participants are encouraged to think of creative ways to commemorate the Gwangju Uprising and to value and celebrate the ideals of democracy. Interns work with volunteers who are usually university students interested in the history of democracy in Korea.

b. 518 Education

The Foundation works in connection with many schools in Gwangju City in order to meet their need for the formulation and promotion of '518' education. International interns are often invited to schools to give presentations about their own cultures and personal background, and the development of democracy in their countries.

c. Guided Tours to Historic Places

In the course of the year, the Foundation is usually visited by a number of groups and individuals who wish to learn more about the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising. International interns may be required to give guided tours of the 518 National Cemetery and other historical sites around Gwangju City.

d. The MAINS Summer School

The Foundation has a long history of close partnership with Sungkonghoe University near Seoul through the university's Masters of Arts in Inter-Asia NGO Studies (MAINS) program. The curriculum covers a wide range of current issues in the field of international relations from both regional and global perspectives as a major field of studies. In 2009, interns had the opportunity to attend the MAINS summer school, which featured lecturers from Japan, Korea, America and Europe. Through the summer school, interns were able to establish and foster close connections with MAINS students from across the world.

e. Research Projects

Aside from their other duties, interns have the opportunity to work on their own research projects on topics related to the May 18 Democratic Uprising or human rights and peace issues in Asia.

Challenges and Accomplishments

As with every project of this nature, the internship program is not without its challenges. Interns are expected to be one hundred per cent committed to the activities of the Foundation. During large-scale events such as the Gwangju International Peace Forum in May and the Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School in August/September, the interns endured long hours of work for many consecutive days without break for weekends. In addition to the demands of their working schedule, interns have to cope with the culture shock of moving to a totally new environment and all the difficulties that it entails, including the language barrier and unfamiliar working environment. However, the staffs of the Foundation work as a team, providing help and support to interns not only in terms of their professional life but personal life as well. During the course of the year interns have the opportunity to make many Korean friends and to learn about Korean culture and customs, broadening their horizons and deepening their understanding of the world.

Observations and Evaluation

Interns are assigned to work with a supervisor who is responsible for providing them with a description of duties and a work plan. Upon completion of the internship, both the supervisor and the intern are required to complete a final report describing what was achieved during the internship. Furthermore, every intern is requested to complete an evaluation questionnaire on his/her assignment and to submit it to the Foundation. In this way the internship is evaluated both from the perspective of the interns and from the point of view of the Foundation and the interns' superiors. In addition, several of the projects and programs implemented by the interns are evaluated separately. For example, in 2009 one section of the Gwangju Asia Human Rights Folk School was dedicated to staff evaluation. The majority of comments from Folk School participants were overwhelmingly positive: the interns and other staff were described as friendly, helpful, efficient, dedicated and polite. This was a great encouragement to the interns!

Views of the Interns

The interns themselves expressed their views about the internship program, providing in the process a glimpse of how they value their internship experience. An intern in the 2009 program wrote the following account:

I first heard of the May 18 Memorial Foundation international internship program through a link sent to me by a Korean friend. At that time I had been living in Korea for about a year, working with a human rights NGO in Seoul, and was looking for positions in Korea in the field of human rights and social action. In particular I wanted to broaden my knowledge of Asian human rights and democracy and to work on issues relevant to Korean society and the Asian regional community. The internship seemed like a brilliant way to contribute to the field I was most passionate about and a good opportunity to gain experience in the field of human rights.

My internship began in March 2009. The first project I worked on was the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights. My role was essentially to receive and process nominations. All the information submitted by the nominee had to be checked and summarized before being evaluated by a panel of experts. Although I was a little apprehensive about presenting my report to the panel, I really valued being involved in the process. Having been involved in the prize project from day one, I feel very honoured to have contributed in some small way to the work of the prizewinner, Burmese student activist Min Ko Naing.

The other events that stand out in my mind are the Gwangju International Peace Forum and the Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School. For me, these two activities were definitely the most significant events during my internship. The GIPF was a large-scale event involving hundreds of participants from all over Asia. Preparation for the event began several months before and for the duration of the Forum it took over my whole life! I was responsible for relaying information to participants and ensuring everyone was in the right place at the right time. The language barrier and the long hours made the work quite stressful, but it was all worth it. I was able to meet and learn from activists who had been working on human rights for over 30 years, and had the opportunity to interact with people from all over the world. I was constantly surprised by the participants' eagerness to share their knowledge and experience, and I am so grateful for all I learned during that period.

The Folk School was also a wonderful opportunity to make new contacts... and friends! 20 activists from across Asia participated in the Folk School. As an intern, I not only studied and worked but also lived with the participants at the venue. Over the course of the program we opened up and shared something of our lives with one another, forming special and long-lasting relationships. The Folk School was a brilliant educational opportunity, but it was also a chance to

experience the spirit of international solidarity.

Naturally, my internship experience has not been problem-free! Although my previous experience of living in Korea was useful outside the office, I had never really experienced Korean working culture before I started work at the Foundation. This was something of a culture shock! My internship has not only taught me about human rights as a concept, but also about working and living in a culture very different from my own. In my opinion, the value of this kind of experience should not be overlooked.

Overall, I am very pleased with my internship experience so far. Despite and because of its challenges, I have learned so much about myself, other people, and the world of human rights. I recommend anyone with an interest in human rights education and events to apply for this internship.

A few more comments from previous interns:

Being an intern here in the May 18 Memorial Foundation gave me a lot of opportunities to learn about the democratization process in Korea. Since I worked for a victim-based organization, what most attracted my attention was the victims' movement here in Korea that was an important lesson to be shared with Indonesian victims' community.

Through this internship I was also able to interact with people or groups working on some other issues beside those 'victims things', such as: labour, urban poor, housing rights, women, migrant worker[s], environment, lawyer[s], academe, youth, etc. Besides the learning from my Korean experiences, I also had an opportunity to share Indonesia's current issues. Like once, with the support from my co-interns and the staff of the Foundation, we conducted a signature campaign to commemorate the 1st death anniversary of Munir, an Indonesian human rights activist who was murdered on September 8, 2004. We were able to gather about 800 signatures from the citizens of Gwangju City. The collected signatures were sent to Indonesia as a show of solidarity of Korean people for the Munir case. One thing that has impressed me is that the people here have a quite high respect for the sacrifices of the people in the past. I think this custom has

influenced the process of reaffirming justice especially in case of dealing with the past human rights violations. And it has strengthened Korea as a nation.

- Agnes Gurning (IKOHI, Indonesia)

At first, most of my expectations of the internship did not match with the real program of the internship. However, the tasks I helped to implement such as Gwangju Asian Human Rights Folk School, Gwangju Forum for Asian Human Rights, Gwangju Prize for Human Rights Award 2006; and the different activities such as NGO visits and attending seminars made the internship more meaningful. Also, I became a speaker in Gwangju Human Rights Film Festival and was responsible for inviting Indonesia's famous rock band called Slank Band to the "Echo of Asia" peace concert. Since the Foundation holds several events and invites participants from other countries, I believe that The May 18 Memorial Foundation is the right organization to help and support Asian countries with their campaigns.

Mustawalad (KontraS, Indonesia)

My internship was a very unique and worthwhile experience. I always believed that traveling and living in a foreign country broadened one's horizon, so that made me want to travel some more. I particularly liked the trust I was afforded as an intern. Also, the unity and cooperation among us interns were great. Despite cultural and religious differences we were able to transcend divisions and we could say that we became more than colleagues but real friends if not brothers and sisters. I hope that I have contributed to the aims and objectives of the internship program and I am optimistic that the little accomplishments my co-interns and I have achieved have [become] a good basis for the next batch to improve on and make greater contributions for the continued success of the internship program. I wish the next batch of interns [to gain] maximum benefit both in their professional career and personal growth in this internship program.

- Pete Rahon (CO Multiversity, Philippines)

The Future of the International Internship Program

In the future, the Foundation hopes to continue the internship program in order to further aid the promotion and protection of human rights, peace and genuine democracy in the Asian region. The internship program is a

way of investing in individuals with an interest in human rights and a personal history of active participation in related fields. Education naturally constitutes a crucial part of the internship program: Folk School participants, MAINS program students, Korean university student volunteers, local secondary school students, and the interns themselves are all recipients of human rights education and learning. Effective, inclusive, accessible, practical and participant-centred education is vital to the development of an international community built upon tolerance and understanding. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of peace, human rights and democracy is in the hands of young people willing to dedicate their lives to the realization of these ideals.

Notes for Applicants

Applicants to the Internship Program should submit the following documentation:

- A completed, dated and signed internship application form
- A copy of Curriculum Vitae
- A scanned copy of valid and not yet expired passport
- A write-up detailing expectations, objectives, and interest in the human rights internship program (not more than two pages)
- An official endorsement letter from a superior or head of the organization of the applicant
- An endorsement/Referral Letter from any Alumni/Contact/Network of the Foundations in the country or abroad
- A proof of enrollment in undergraduate studies and a list of courses taken, transcripts of grades or diplomas
- A written sample of research work or an abstract of academic papers (3-10 pages maximum), if undertaken.

The closing date for applications is usually at the end of November of the year prior to the internship period. For more details and to download the application form, please see the Foundation website: www.eng.518.org/eng/
Or contact:

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Endnote:

¹The most tragic and disgraceful incident in modern Korean history took place in Gwangju in May 1980. During the uprising many citizens of Gwangju were killed by soldiers. It started with the December 12, 1979 coup by Chun Doo-hwan's military junta who occupied the Chonnam Provincial Hall with armed forces sent to Gwangju by the Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters. After the assassination of President Park Chung-hee, a group of politically minded soldiers undertook Operation Chungjung (Operation True Heart) to quell the uprising in Gwangju. In this way, the Fifth Republic came into existence. The victims of the martial law force's brutality numbered 4,369 all told: 154 killed, 74 missing, 4,141 wounded (including those who died from their wounds) and placed under arrest. (<http://eng.518.org/eng/html/main.html?TM18MF=02020000>)