

# BATTLE FOR HOUSING RIGHTS IN KOREA

Report of the South Korea Project of  
the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights



Asian Coalition for Housing Rights  
Third World Network

# **Battle For Housing Rights In Korea**

Report of the South Korea Project of the  
Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights  
Third World Network

Published by  
Asian Coalition for Housing Rights  
P O Box 24-74, Klongchan  
Bangkok, Bangkok 10240,  
Thailand

with  
Third World Network  
87, Cantonment Road,  
10250 Penang,  
Malaysia

Printed by Jutaprint  
54, Kejang Road  
Penang  
Malaysia

Cover photo montage:  
Photo of building by Carol Lee  
Photo of woman by Kim Seong-Su

1989  
ISBN 983-99573-1-7

## CONTENTS

<b>I</b>	<b>The South Korea Project</b>	
	Introduction	1
	The Urban Poor and City-Wide Evictions by the City Redevelopment Program in South Korea	5
	The Logic and Importance of ACHR's Korea Project	11
<b>II</b>	<b>Fact Finding Team's Report</b>	
	Introduction	21
	Fact Finding Report	24
<b>III</b>	<b>Information On The Urban Poor Of Korea</b>	
	Introduction	47
	Poor Urban Areas In South Korea	65

The  
South Korea  
Project

## INTRODUCTION

In view of the wide scale violations of housing rights by brutal and forced evictions in South Korea, it was unanimously proposed that the South Korea be targetted for the first project of ACHR's regional action plan. Diverse regional efforts will be geared towards this case.

Korea was chosen for the first project of ACHR for two reasons:

- 1) It was listed along with South Africa, (in the Berlin 1987 Habitat conference) as one of the two countries in the world where evictions by force are most brutal and inhuman.
- 2) Because of the 1988 Olympics, international attention is focused on Korea.

The redevelopment policy of the South Korean Government entails planned eviction of 230 slums affecting some 3.5 million poor people. Housing rights abuses in Korea are found to be one of the worst in the region.

The purpose, of the Korea Project, is to try to stop the brutal evictions. It is also hoped that the Korea Project will strategically show the wide scale violations of the people's basic rights to live by denying people's basic housing rights. This represents a growing trend in the Asian region.

While the focus of this project is on South Korea, it is hoped that the effects will be felt all over Asia and throughout the world.

The real logic of the Korea Project is to use the extreme cases of eviction in Korea WHILE world attention is turned towards the Olympics as a means towards:

- 1) Bringing the urban poor of many different cities in Asia together, mobilizing them in a common action, and raising their consciousness of human shelter as a HUMAN RIGHT;
- 2) Bringing to world attention the whole issue of housing in a new light: not as a building but as a necessity and fundamental RIGHT for HUMAN existence.

3) Through all these activities, to make ACHR a Coalition which always leads to and results in ACTION.

The objectives of the Korea Project are:

- 1) To expose and to end the cruelty and violence of evictions in South Korea.
- 2) To pressure the Korean Government to stop all evictions; and
- 3) To highlight to the world community, the issues of evictions and the denial of housing rights and to show the impact of market mechanisms on the growing shelterlessness of the poor.

**Phase 1 of the project:**

Korean September (September 2<sup>nd</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup>)  
(Dates of Olympics: September 17<sup>th</sup> to October 2<sup>nd</sup>)

- An International Fact-Finding Team (FFT) will visit South Korea during the first week of September to study the redevelopment and eviction situation in depth. A statement on their findings will be announced in South Korea and in their home countries upon their return.

The FFT report will be crucial for the subsequent ACHR actions in different countries. Therefore, the FFT report will be issued in South Korea. It will be immediately sent to all ACHR countries and other contacts all over the world.

The FFT will consist of respected individuals selected from different regions worldwide, representing the various views of the world community involved in housing and human rights.

- The second stage of the first phase will be coordinated efforts in each of the Asian member countries during September to follow-up on the fact-finding mission. Various activities are planned and they will produce different reactions. It is also expected to be the beginning of an Asia-wide, and hopefully eventually worldwide, signature campaign to stop all evictions.

**Phase 2 of the project:**

An International Convention in Seoul, South Korea.  
ASIAN CONVENTION OF HOUSING RIGHTS \*

The convention is planned as the culmination of the activities in the Korea Project. The purpose of the convention will be: first, to make a direct impact on the Korean situation by trying to interact the convention with the local situation and second,

\* This convention was originally planned to be held in December 1988, but was postponed to 14-20 June 1989. The convention is now titled "A PLACE TO LIVE: ASIAN PEOPLES' DIALOGUE".

to the region as a whole. At the end of this seminar, the Korea Project will be evaluated and a new project will be inaugurated.

For more information, details, or other documents like the videos entitled "Poverty Prohibited" (30 minutes) and "Sangkye-dong Olympics", please contact:

Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha  
ACHR secretariat  
P O Box 24-74 Klongchan  
Banglapi, Bangkok 10240  
THAILAND

## THE URBAN POOR AND CITY-WIDE EVICTIONS BY THE CITY REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN SOUTH KOREA

### REDEVELOPMENT AREA

In 1981, it was decided that the 1988 Olympics will be held in Seoul. Although in 1980 the government had announced that there would be no more forcible evictions, planning for large-scale Redevelopment Areas started as soon as the hosting of the Olympics became a certainty.

Between 1982 and 1988 around 250 sites were designated as 'Redevelopment Areas'. Of these, around 100 have already been 'redeveloped' — that is, the people have been evicted. It is estimated that between 3 and 3.5 million people live on these 250 sites. The government however denies these estimates. Government statistics have excluded tenants from their figures as the government's position is that tenants have no rights. Tenants are estimated to make up 60% of the population.

Most of the land in redevelopment areas is owned by the city, thus technically most people are squatters — even though those evicted in the early 1960s from the inner city were forcibly dumped in their present location. In cases where the land is privately owned, until 1987 the landowners were paid only 10-15% of the land's market value. However, beginning from last year, some payments are now close to the market value.

Most of the sites designated for redevelopment have already been 'redeveloped' by the urban poor themselves. The agricultural policies of the 1960s dovetailed with the government's industrialization policies. With agreements to import farm products in ever increasing amounts from the United States, farmers, young and old, were forced to leave the villages and come to Seoul to work in the factories. They lived in places considered uninhabitable: tops of mountains, swamps, and along open sewer-streams. If they were evicted after they had made these areas fit for human habitation, they settled again in areas which were remote from the city at that time. They would walk 30 minutes to catch their bus to the city centre. As Seoul expanded, and especially after construction of the subway-electric train system, these remote areas have again become prime real estate — and the urban poor are being chased away again.

The average family income per month for the people living in these areas is US\$250. Most of the men work as day-labourers in the building industry, while women work as street-vendors or are employed in restaurants or as maids. These people belong to the informal labour sector. The factory workers (formal labour sector) are mostly young people and they live in very crowded conditions in rooms nearby the industrial zones.

#### REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Redevelopment means demolishing 1-storey homes in areas where the urban poor are concentrated. Here rooms are small and rents are cheap. New 12 to 15 storey apartment buildings would be constructed. An average profit of \$412 is made for every square meter of the new building.

Until 1985, all redevelopment projects were carried out by the city government. The last big city-directed project was in Mok

Dong. The clear profits from that project estimated at between US\$1.5bn and US\$2bn. It was announced in the newspapers that this profit would be used to prepare for the Olympics. But the Mok Dong project became a problem for the City: the people being evicted resisted strongly (for example, there were more than 200 separate demonstrations). The university students took notice and joined the struggle. Thus after 1984, the government drew up a new redevelopment scheme called 'Joint (or Co-operative) Redevelopment.'

The City Planning Section of Seoul City plans and indirectly oversees the redevelopment projects. The 'Cooperative Redevelopment' system was devised by it. In this system, homeowners and a construction company make a contract for the redevelopment project. Thus, local and central government offices deny having any responsibility since redevelopment is now a private matter between the construction company and the landlords.

When a contract is made, 60 - 80% of the 'homeowners' are likely to be real-estate investors or speculators. They receive a ticket which entitles them to buy one of the new apartments that are to be constructed. The remaining 20 - 40% of the homeowners are the original (urban poor) residents. Most of them will also sign up for the project voluntarily because they are given the impression that they will get a new apartment for only US\$2,000 - 3,000.

But only 5 - 10% of the (urban poor) homeowners actually move into the new apartments, because they later found out that the downpayment itself is around US\$15,000. Out of those who move in, most move out within 1 or 2 years because the monthly payments on the housing loan and the maintenance costs for a much larger house are too expensive. They also move for cultural reasons: modern-style apartments do not fit the culture of the poor and the social pressures caused



by the much more affluent people who have moved in and now live next door. In summary, redevelopment in Korea for lower class homeowners has resulted in them becoming tenants again.

As for the tenants in these areas (usually 60% of the population), many simply move away when the area is announced as a redevelopment area. Those who cannot move (because of work conditions or economic reasons) find that rents in nearby areas have already risen 2, 3 or 4 times as demolition approaches. It becomes impossible for them to go anywhere and they decide to resist the demolitions and the development.

To deal with this resistance, the housing cooperative (formed by the 'homeowners' and the construction company) hires groups to come in and beat up the tenants. These groups are made up of ex-convicts, thugs, people trained in violence, and unemployed young men. The lowest salary offered to them in 1986 was US\$25 a day. This demolition force numbers between 20 people and 400, depending on the situation. Riot police, ranging from 40 to 300, are also in attendance. The highest officials from the local police station also observe the entire battle, and then issue arrest-warrants to the people for resisting eviction.

Wherever there is resistance to eviction, many people (both men and women) spend several days in jail and between 2 and 5 people are indicted, stand trial and are sentenced to an average of two years imprisonment; they are usually released on bail and given a suspended sentence after about 6 months.

Even by the present redevelopment law, it is illegal to demolish a house if someone is physically present in it, is living in it, or there is furniture in it. All of these restrictions have been ignored.

Three people have died — one old man and two nine-year-old boys — when walls or roofs collapsed on them. Several have committed suicide in anger, frustration, protest and despair and at least 5 other people have died in causes related to the demolition.

The courts are controlled and there has been no case of any compensation for damages suffered. The people are beaten up unmercifully resulting in broken fingers, arms, legs; injured spines; teeth knocked out; cuts and bruises; brain damage and brain surgery.

Perhaps the most excessive incident was when the riot police forcefully stole the corpse of one of the 9 year-old boys who died, cremated it against the wishes of the family, and scattered the ashes in an unknown place (so that there could be no funeral or grave that might become a rallying point for the urban poor. Around 200 people from many redevelopment areas guarded the corpse day and night for 2 days, but were beaten up and driven away by tear gas so that the corpse could be snatched.)

#### MOTIVES FOR REDEVELOPMENT

The primary motive is simply profits. On the average, the net profit is US\$412 per square meter or US\$36 per square foot of new building space. The average apartment size would be 100 sq.m. or 1,000 sq. ft. At the moment, the largest project entails 57,000 new apartments in just one area. The apartments are built upto 12 to 15 storeys high because anything lower or higher brings less profit.

The second motive is beautification. In this sense, the Olympics is connected at least indirectly with all of the redevelopment plans. Some areas were evicted in order to build Olym-

pics facilities; others because they were visible from these facilities or from tourist hotels or from main roads. During the spring and summer of 1988, many areas were evicted because they were close to the path along which the olympic torch will be carried. This path extends from the very southernmost city of Pusan right up and across the country to Incheon and then on into Seoul. The Sang Kyei Dong evictees, whose 3 year battle has become famous both inside and outside Korea, are not allowed to build anything on or even bring their furniture and belongings to the land that they have bought and legally own, simply because the Olympic torch will pass by on September 17th. These people had to dig holes and live underground from January 22 until the end of April because the demolition crews destroyed everything they set up above ground. When rains came in late April, they moved above ground and are living in plastic tents.

#### THE RESULTS OF REDEVELOPMENT

1. Lower-class homeowners became room tenants.
2. Tenants have to move to the edge of the city where they pay higher rents for smaller space and poorer conditions (in unheated attics and basements).
3. A sharp and abnormal increase in the cost of homes and rental rates for ALL shelter.
4. Resisting tenants are beaten, injured, or arrested.
5. Upper class nuclear families (just 2 parents whose children have all married, or young married couples with 1 or 2 children) occupy larger and larger apartments.
6. The urban poor families (3 or 4 children plus grandparents) are squeezed into smaller and smaller space.

7. Urban poor communities (villages within the city), which are 20 to 50 years old are destroyed. The cultural, social and economic consequences of this destruction are enormous. These pockets of the urban poor are the last bastions of traditional Korean culture, because they have been least Americanized.
8. Social consequences: the bonds between neighbours are very strong and it is these deep human relationships which allow the poor to 'digest' their anger and resentment.
9. Economic consequences: being scattered and moving to an unknown area means that the construction workers lose their 'contact points' for getting jobs and the street vendors lose their established place and customers and it takes them months to begin to get established again. In losing their close neighbours they also lose the 'structures' of sharing food, fuel and money in crisis situations.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION ON SOUTH KOREA

General	(Money figures = US\$ )
Land-size	99,200 km <sup>2</sup> (66% of area is mountains)
Population	42,000,000
Population per km <sup>2</sup>	Seoul: 425 (Japan: 325)
Capital	Seoul (population: over 10,000,000)
	Greater Seoul Area: 17,000,000
Variation in temperature	High of 35°C; Low of -22°C (minus)
Head of State:	President Roh Tae Woo
(address)	The Blue House Seoul, Korea

**Profile of the Urban Poor \***

Average family size:	5
MAIN occupations for men:	day-labourers/construction work
women:	street-vending
Average family income per month:	\$300
Average month rental costs:	\$70 for 13m <sup>2</sup> (1 room + small kitchen)
Cost of rice per family per month:	\$110
Other food costs per month:	\$110

Note: These food costs are based on the normal diet of rice + vegetable side-dishes (3 times a day). Obviously, the urban poor cannot afford the preferred diet. They frequently substitute noodles for rice and skip side-dishes.

Education: Virtually 100% of the children finish 9 years of schooling. Around 90% would finish 3 more years of high school. Very, very few can attempt to enter the university.

**General Housing Situation in Seoul Area**

Percentage of homeowners : Official statistics: 51%  
realistic estimate: 40%

\* Statistics here are recorded as of August, 1988. Housing costs have risen again dramatically in the first half of 1989.

Cost of new apartment: \$49,733 for smallest size (60m<sup>2</sup>)  
downpayment: \$16,000  
housing-loan interest-rate/year: 11.4%  
average monthly payments: \$160

Leasing-costs for 60m<sup>2</sup> house: \$40,000 to \$45,000  
20m<sup>2</sup> room: \$15,000

Note: This 'key-money' is deposited in one lump-sum and returned to tenants when they move out.

Monthly-rental costs: wide variations according to size, quality and location, but cheapest rates would be a payment-guarantee deposit of \$130/m<sup>2</sup> and a monthly rental fee of \$5.5 per m<sup>2</sup>. Thus, for 10 m<sup>2</sup> deposit of \$1,300 and monthly payments of \$55.

## THE LOGIC AND IMPORTANCE OF ACHR'S KOREA PROJECT

A note from John Daly to ACHR members.

### THE LOGIC.

The logic of the Korea project is not mainly to embarrass the Korean government through various activities (although this will be a side-effect).

The real logic of the Korea Project is to use the extreme cases of eviction in Korea WHILE world attention is turned towards the Olympics as a means towards:

- 1) Bringing the urban poor of many different cities in Asia together, mobilizing them in a common action, and raising their consciousness of human shelter as a HUMAN RIGHT;
- 2) Bringing to world attention (in a rather dramatic way) the whole issue of housing in a new light: not as a building but as an absolute necessity and fundamental RIGHT for HUMAN existence.
- 3) Through all these activities, to make ACHR (right from its very beginning) a coalition which always leads to and results in ACTION.

In the 'logic' of the Korea Project, the Fact Finding Team is the crucial factor. Its activities come first — i.e. they are the first public activities of ACHR.

The FFT's report will be issued in Korea. It will be immediately be sent to all ACHR countries and to other contacts all over the world, asking them to get this report (or part of it) in the local newspapers (Korean embassies monitor news about Korea very well, so all this coverage will be reported back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Next, many different groups in many countries will send a copy of the FFT report to the Korean embassy (and to several government officials in Korea) along with a covering letter underlining the important issues in the report. About a week later, these same groups in each country will send in a list of signatures to stop eviction in Korea or letters from the urban poor or letters from NGOs and CBOs (Community-Based Organizations), along with a covering letter which will again underline and highlight the FFT report. Finally, after the Olympics is over and Korea settles down a little bit, there will be a rally of the Urban Poor at City Hall in Seoul and copies of all the signatures, letter, newspaper articles etc. will be handed over to the Mayor of Seoul. (At least mention of this event will get in some Korean newspapers) so the government cannot keep all these activities secret and pretend there was no such thing as KOREAN SEPTEMBER.

The 'logic' of the International Asia Convention in Korea in December (the special content and nature of the convention is explained in the section of this document) is 3-fold:

- 1) To hammer in the final nail in terms of putting pressure on the Korean government
- 2) To discuss the problem of evictions from a NEW focus: the violation of a basic human right.
- 3) To bring ACHR members together to evaluate (in addition to the content of the seminar) the Korea Project and to

choose a new project (Project No 2). This convention and its accompanying evaluation of ACHR's activities from June to December 1988 will help ACHR to achieve a clearer and more concrete sense of identity so as to be more effective in the future.

### THE IMPORTANCE

There are thousands of groups/agencies working on 'housing' all over the world with such a diversity of goals, methods, ideologies, areas of concern and interest, approaches, viewpoints, 'spirit', etc.

I see the Korea Project as the beginning of a way to 'raise' many or all these activities to a new level of consciousness about housing itself. I also think the Korea Project will, in effect, define what ACHR is (or will become): a network in Asia which will link up with Africa, Latin America and certain groups in North America and Europe on the level of a MOVEMENT (which does not have to be so radical or political) towards recognizing housing (some kind of secure shelter) as a basic human right — a right so fundamental that it cannot be separated from the right to exist.

Adequate or better housing for better, more fully-human living — this is a SECONDARY (down-the-road) problem. The first step is to convince everyone that appropriation of a PLACE with some real length-of-time security is absolutely essential for human living on the basic (restricted) level. Every human being has the absolute need and right to have a place he or she can call 'mine' (although this does not at all mean to imply the necessity of ownership.)

The concept of Human Rights has been too narrowly limited to 'political' issues: freedom of speech, conscience, right to a just trial etc. Two of the most basic human rights are co-

extensive with existence itself: the right to food and the right to a place-to-exist.

Concerning the right to food, I personally think that the most important and fundamental issue is in the rural/agricultural area vis-a-vis policies and plans and models of Development. The artificial inflation of food prices caused by the Agro-Business (cost of machinery + repair parts; chemical fertilisers and insecticides; costs of food processing plus the irrational, long-distances of delivery; irrationalities and graft in the import/export of food products) tramples every day on the basic right of people for food. This problem has to be addressed by farmers', environmentalists' and consumers' movement.

But while, in a logical sequence, the basic mistakes in development policies begin in the rural area, DE FACTO, in reality, big urban centers are not only here to stay but will continue to increase. While the quality of rural housing is a real problem (which also must be addressed) the basic violation of the minimum of a right to a place is happening in the cities. Thus the importance of cities and the importance of Housing in the cities defines for us the importance of ACHR, of the Korea Project.

Precisely because housing is such a basic need and because, in the general consciousness, this 'need' has never been translated into a basic right, housing has become the easiest target of speculation and investment for quick profits, and thus housing has become in the modern (post-industrial revolution and consequent urbanization) period a means of exploitation.

This was brought home to me very clearly during the recent visit to England. People without jobs or a home receive 80P or \$142 (1 GBP = US\$1.78) a week. Those living in B & B (Bed and Breakfast) 'hotels' immediately pay out 70P (\$1.24) for a bed for

7 nights and some coffee and bread each morning. They have 10P (\$18) for 14 other meals (+ other expenses) for the rest of the week! What these B & B hotels do is fill up every room (even what was originally the dining room) with beds, so that a former 2-storey house built for 1 family originally, now has 25 people paying 10P (\$18) every day. So the landlord's income is 250P (\$445) a day, or 91,250P (\$162,425) a year!

In an area of London called Earls Court, 8.4 million pounds per year are paid to the B & B owners, i.e. \$14,952,000. It has been calculated that all of these people could be housed in new or renovated homes where the construction and renovation would cost GBP5.25 million. This approach could save GBP3.1 million (\$5.5 million) from one year's budget, eliminate this expenditure of tax money in future budgets, and create employment with the new construction work. Why does the government perpetuate a system which wastes the money people pay in taxes, exploits the poor and fails to ease employment? The only answer seems to be that one group — the owners of real estate — are making huge profits.

Thus, a house has become a commodity which allows more and more exploitation of the poor — in terms of exorbitant rental fees, or forceful evictions and displacements to make room for new money-making houses/office buildings.

Therefore, ACHR, through the Korea Project, is tackling eviction from the standpoint that it is the radical deprivation of this basic human right to a place to live.

In this light, let me explain the Asia Convention for Housing Rights to be held in Seoul. Not only funding agencies, but many people are tired of international seminars and feel they are not worth the money. I think this convention is quite different from previous seminars on housing.

Although the contents and agenda are not yet finalized, I personally do not want another seminar of statistics, or of building methodologies or about the participation of the people. Those kinds of topics are no longer needed. But we do need to address the issue of how and why housing is a right. This can be done by showing what happens to families, to old people, to children, to women, workers, whole communities, and cultures when people are evicted. In other words, we have to address the social, political, economic, educational, cultural, psychological (human) costs or aspects or results of eviction. In this approach, we can hope to somehow demonstrate in an empirical way to governments that eviction is bad for the country as a whole and hopefully we can begin to articulate in a somewhat understandable way what we mean when we say that a human being, by birth, has a right to a place-to-exist.

August 1988

# Fact Finding Team's Report

## Acknowledgements

Members of Fact Finding Team and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights would like to express our deep gratitude for the help, friendly cooperation as well as warm hospitality the team had got from the following groups: the people and leaders of Chang Shin Dong, Seo Cho Dong, Toh Wha Dong, Yang Pyeong Dong, Don Am Dong, Peong Wha Chon and Sang Kyei Dong Communities; Cardinal Kim, Ministry of Construction, Seoul Municipality; Korean Research Institute for Human Settlements; Toh Wha Dong Cooperative; President of the Lawyer Association, Young Architect Group; Sogang University; Groups of Bogumjahri and many hard working and dedicated friends.

As well as deep thanks to MISEROR, CAFOD and CEBEMO for financial assistance, CIIR and YUVA for all cooperation provided.

15 September 1988

## INTRODUCTION\*

At the invitation of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights — the Asian Section of Habitat International Coalition — a fact finding mission has visited Korea from 5 to 10 September, 1988 in order to report on the housing situation of the urban poor.

Habitat International Coalition is a federation of over 200 non-governmental and community-based organisations devoted to action for the recognition and implementation of the right of everyone to secure a place in which to live in peace and dignity. Members of the fact finding team are:

- Judge Krishna Iyer, Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of India (Chairman)
- John Battle, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom
- Ms Somsook Boonyabantha, Secretary of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Thailand
- Denis Murphy, Journalist, Philippines
- Phra Mahanarong, Jitasopano, Senior Buddhist Monk, Director, Buddhist Research Institute, Thailand
- Peter Swan, Media Specialist, Australia
- Han van Patten, Former Secretary General International Union of Local Authorities, Board Member Habitat International Coalition, Netherlands

\* This document was issued as a press release on 10th September 1988.

The team has visited urban poor communities in *Chang Shin Dong, Seo Cho Dong, Tak Villa Dong, Yang Pyeong Dong, Don Am Dong* and *Pyeong Wha Chon*. It has had discussions with Cardinal Kim, and senior representatives of the Ministry of Construction, the city of Seoul, and the Korea National Housing Corporation. It has met with community leaders, lawyers, researchers and journalists.

Its findings can be summarized as follows:

- Commensurate with the unprecedented growth of the national wealth of the country, there has been enormous construction activity in Korea during the last three decades.
- The housing policy of the government, which is claimed to be based solely in the free play of market forces, has made no provision for meeting the needs of the low income communities, especially the renters among them.
- This government approach has adversely affected the people who live in "redevelopment" areas. Redevelopment areas are neighbourhoods which are designated for "improvement and beautification": which means that the existing dwellings are demolished. In Seoul there are 210 such areas inhabited by at least 2,000,000 people. The homeowners in these areas are offered the right to buy an apartment on the redeveloped site. The actual situation is that on average only 10% of them can afford the price of the new dwellings and the other 90% are obliged to sell their rights. They are then in the same situation as the tenants from these areas who constitute more than 60% of their populations. No adequate provisions exist for rehousing tenants. They usually are unable to find in the neighbourhood other rental accommodations for a price they can afford and have no place to go.
- Under these circumstances it is not surprising that they are

unwilling to leave their homes voluntarily. The team heard reports of many cases where groups of thugs, sometimes under the eyes of police and officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. The team has heard personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts of people being severely beaten and several being arrested (and later being condemned to imprisonment for up to 6 months). The team knows the names of 13 persons who have lost their lives as a result of these interventions.

— As a result of these evictions many people are forced to pay a higher price for a smaller space; communities are broken; family life suffers; people lose access to jobs and their children cannot attend schools.

Over the period 1983 to 1988 it is estimated that, under the redevelopment schemes, 48,000 buildings — the homes of 720,000 people — have been destroyed.

— In its contacts with communities which had been subject to eviction (several 3 of them up to 5 times) and harassments the team was struck by their keen insistence on their humanity in the face of what they had suffered and are up against, as well as their willingness to cooperate in the search for reasonable solutions and to sacrifice a considerable part of their earnings for this purpose.

— The government officials with whom the team met did not deny the facts as recorded above. They claimed that no forced evictions had taken place since May of this year in view of the Olympic games. They informed the team that the present government is reviewing its housing policies and practices. However, no change regarding the status and rights of tenants seems to be forthcoming. Neither were they prepared to undertake commitments to the cessation of large-scale evictions.



## FACT FINDING REPORT

*"Shelter is the Root of Happiness"  
Buddhist Saying*

The Fact Finding Team was in Seoul on the eve of the Olympics, when the tremendous achievements of South Korea over the last three decades were becoming apparent to the world. The games cap 35 years of sustained economic growth almost unparalleled in the modern world.

National wealth increased 12 times over since 1955. Seoul was physically rebuilt from the ruins of the 1950-1953 war and now rivals Tokyo in size and sophistication. In 1960 there was one bridge over the Han River linking the two halves of Seoul; now there are 18. Illiteracy has been reduced from 80% to 7% (Japanese colonizers — 1909 to 1945 — had banned use of the Korean language and alphabet). Preparations for the Olympics were also exuberant. A subway system, for example, was constructed.

There is a dark side to this development. Workers, farmers and urban poor have not shared to any great degree in the benefits. Past authoritarian regimes have made it extremely difficult to protest against this exclusion, and so it continued.

The urban poor have probably suffered more than any other group:

● In the years 1985 - 1988 there was an unprecedented dislocation of people in Seoul's poorer areas. A research report of Seoul National University says 48,000 buildings housing 720,000 people were destroyed in those years. Ninety percent of the people had to seek space in other already crowded areas. The dislocation was carried out with at least one eye on the tourists and international scrutiny that would accompany the Olympics.

● The poor were forcibly removed. The team heard of many cases where groups of thugs, sometimes under the eyes of police officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. The team heard personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts of people being severely beaten and arrested (some were sentenced to two years in prison for "special" violence. They usually served two to six months). The team has the names of 13 persons who lost their lives as a result of these interventions from March 1986 to October 1987. As a result of the evictions many people had to pay a higher price for a smaller space; communities were broken; family life suffered; people lost access to jobs and their children couldn't attend schools.

● Renters who are usually 60% of the population in redeveloped areas are excluded by law from sharing in the benefits.

● Close to 2 million poor people in Seoul live in fear that once the Olympics end, the eviction will begin anew.

The Olympics cap the past 35 years, but they also coincide with the coming to power of a new democratically elected government, a full blown opposition and relatively free media. Koreans hope the government will move towards greater respect for human rights, freedom and economic quality, but few we talked with seemed willing to bet that it would.

Government officials concerned with housing to whom the team talked said they were reviewing the past redevelopment policies because they were aware of the many problems found there. They generally disassociated themselves from those policies. They said there probably would be changes, but when asked, wouldn't commit themselves to make any important changes related to renters or evictions.

The Olympic games are, therefore, a watershed in Korean history. They can be seen as the symbol of the country's vast achievements — albeit these are marred by oppression and inequality. Whether the games will mark the beginning of a freer, more egalitarian society remains to be seen. No one is sure what direction the country will take. This ambiguity runs through the team's report.

The team spent most of its time visiting urban poor communities. Some of them are as small as 13 families, remnants of communities that once numbered in the hundreds. They have hung on in or near the areas where they once lived, stubbornly battling attempts over months and years to move them. Those familiar with the Bible might see in them the faithful remnants spoken of by Isaiah and Jesus. The people insist their resistance to evictions is part of their effort "to preserve their humanity".

We wish to tell the story of our visit and present our findings from their point of view. What time the team spent outside of visiting the areas was used trying to understand the roots of the country's housing policy which seemed to be one of the most irrational in Asia. Most of the 48,000 homes destroyed, for example, were solid, one-storey houses.

Seoul proper has 10 million people; greater Seoul close to 17 million. South Korea's total population is about 43 million, so the dominance of Seoul is apparent. About 300,000 poor rural

people migrate to the city each year.

The principal government housing program from 1983 to the present has been the Joint Redevelopment Program. The government has designated 216 areas in Seoul, housing two to three million people, for this program. The areas are generally inhabited by lower income people usually three families to a house, one the house owner, the others the renters.

Theoretically, the homeowners are urged to form a cooperative that will select a construction company and decide on the type of new apartments desired. The cooperative will also manage administrative and financial matters.

The program has been described as joint redevelopment since responsibility is shared by the cooperative and the construction company. Tenants are not eligible for the cooperative or an apartment in the new building. They are given two months' living expenses, also called moving expenses, or a ticket entitling them to buy one-third of a new apartment. This is not a feasible option, so the tickets are quickly sold.

The cooperatives in practice are constituted largely of real estate people and are controlled by the construction companies.

### CHANG SHIN DONG

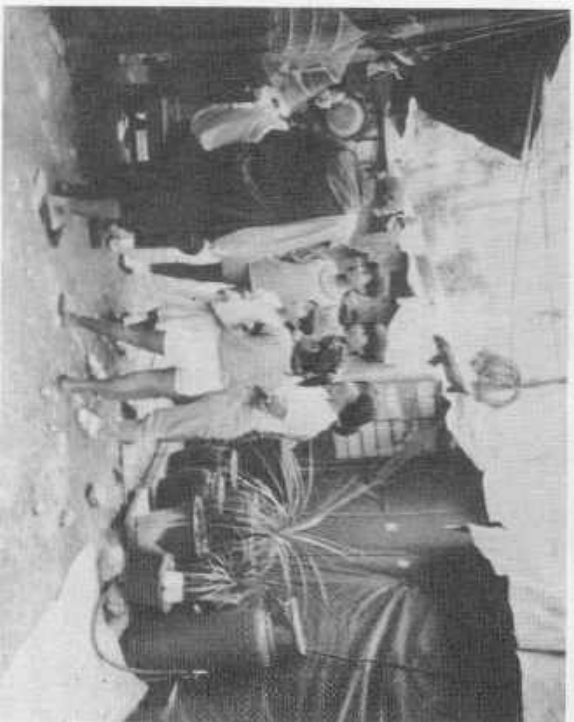
This is a community of 27 families perched on the shelf of a tall hill not far from the heart of downtown Seoul. Before the redevelopment process began, 1,800 to 2,000 families lived together on an adjoining hillside. That area has now been bulldozed and is ready for construction. We visited the families on September 6.

A leader jailed twice for resisting gangsters who had come to destroy his home told us the community grew from three families who arrived in the area in 1950 to farm. In later years others came and lived in caves on the hillsides. By 1958 the hillsides were full of shacks. Nearly all were migrants from the rural areas, abandoning what they described as a hopeless situation there to seek a better life in the city. Many had been evicted from other urban areas.

The people said they were willing to pay up to \$70 a month per family for 5 years, or longer if necessary, to buy the land from the government. They would be delighted with 20 to 23 square meters.

While we talked children bounced up and down on a trampoline. In the air they could see the city spread out below. The people told us only 10% of the home owners will enter the new apartments being built. They were told by a government official the very day we visited them that their community would be evicted when the Olympics were over.

The families, as all the families we visited, have TVs, refrigerators, heaters and good if simple food. The children go to school. Most men and women have jobs of one sort or another. However, they have no medical insurance, nor are there government hospitals to go to if they fall sick. Average family income is about \$300 a month.



### SEO CHO DONG

In the late afternoon of the same day we travelled directly south across the Han river to this community where the people live in reconverted green houses clustered around the monumental new 35 floor Supreme Court building. The area was once the cut-flower center of Seoul, till renting space to families became more profitable than flowers.

The residents were inaugurating their organisation when we arrived. They placed their organisation sign outside their new headquarters as custom required. There were flowers, speeches, soft September sun, chubby babies, politicians and women cooking a meal for all the neighbourhood.

Most probably, we were told, the people would be evicted soon after the Olympics. It seems unlikely they will be allowed to remain in front of the new Supreme Court building – the anomaly is too blatant.

This is not a resettlement area but a place swollen with poor people forced out of redevelopment areas and other places they can no longer afford. There may be as many as 8,000 families here. On the average they pay about \$4,500 for the right to occupy an eight square meter section of the green-house.

Mothers leave their young children at home during the day when they go to work, often locking the door in an attempt to keep them safe. We met a young girl typical of the many Catholic, Protestant and other social action people who help the urban poor. She lives in a greenhouse room. She told us: "I care for the children, take the sick to the hospital, teach the older women to read if they still don't know how to read, and I lead discussion groups." An old woman who attended some of the discussions told us, "I used to think our poverty was our

fault, but now I know that it isn't so." "There's no place for us," another woman said.

A young boy of 8 or 9 seemed about to put a dragonfly on Judge Iyer's shoulder till his mother glared at him. Koreans listen with what seems like solemn gravity, but they laugh easily.



### TOH WHA DONG

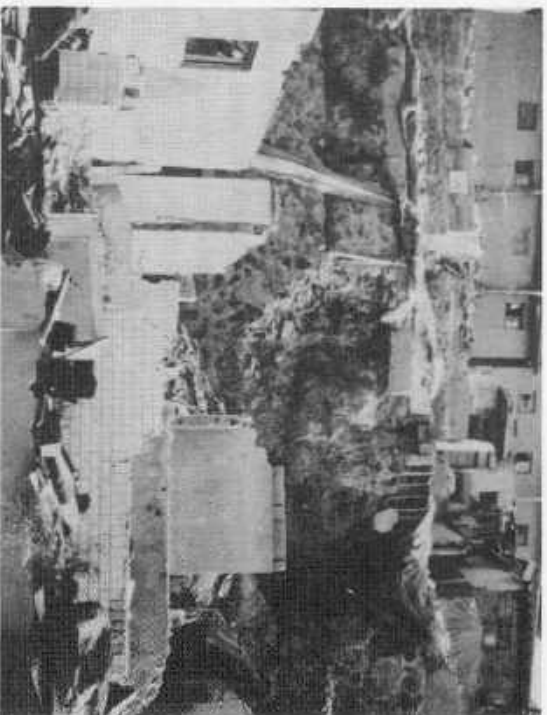
The next day we visited the office of the cooperative established for the Toh Wha Dong redevelopment area. Critics say the cooperatives are docile tools of the big construction companies, such as, Hyundai that build the apartments, and that most cooperative members are real estate dealers or their agents linked to the companies. When questioned about these charges, officials at the Ministry of Construction told us the makeup and activities of the cooperative have been a problem and need re-examination.

The cooperative head, a former homeowner, and an agent of Hyundai spoke with us. The agent seemed to be in charge, for several times he told the cooperative head how to respond. They admitted that only a small fraction of homeowners end up in new apartments.

The price at which the government sold the land to the cooperative was between \$150 and \$160 per square meter, the agent said. He admitted land just outside the redevelopment area would sell for many times that amount. The government, therefore, subsidizes the real estate dealers and construction companies though it often claims to leave housing matters to the free market forces.

The cheapest apartment available in Toh Wha Dong will cost \$38,000, far beyond what the low economic groups can afford.

The people's tiled-roofed homes which range up the side of the hill along narrow twisting roads reminded some of Italian mountain villages. We saw where some people had moved out and destroyed their own homes. When people move out, either because they've sold their rights to real estate agents or for other reasons, they're encouraged to knock down their walls and roofs so other families can't move in. The ruins were



like scenes we've seen in films of earthquake disasters. But even among the ruins life went on. In one corner an old woman skilfully peeled garlic. The houses are individually designed and follow traditional styles. People who work with the urban poor say that the last strongholds of traditional Korean culture exist in the urban poor areas.

A leader told us: "American capitalism has invaded Asia. Even here at the top of this high hill in an out of the way place you can see its effects. This redevelopment scheme is all about making money for the high government officials and the big construction companies."

He thought Korea should have its own slower rhythm of development and not try to follow the West. While he talked a baby slept on the floor.

Most men are construction workers who are employed only six months a year due to stoppages in winter, the rainy season and other delays. Their average monthly pay for the year, then, is about \$250 a month. These people have no security. If they don't work, they don't eat. The government has a welfare program of food and coal for old people over 60 with no sources of income and for widows with minor children.

The people said they suffer in a variety of ways when they are forced out of an area. The new housing is usually more expensive and more crowded. They lose their contacts for getting jobs, for example, with labour contractors. The children's schooling is interrupted. Happy communities of people who supported one another are destroyed.

"Look at our children. See what this has done to them," a woman said. The children looked fine, but she repeated, "Look at them." People working with the poor say the children suffer from the tension in the air. The people in another

area showed us pictures of their children sleeping in the open in winter during one eviction struggle. The small children were lined up under a blanket, their heads poking out.

The people say they had a meeting one night to discuss their problems and on coming out of the meeting, police and gangsters beat them up. "We went to the cooperative office and sat in for five days until the police promised to catch the gangsters, and the head of the cooperative apologized. Another time riot police stopped us when we started on a peaceful march to explain our situation. Three of us were arrested. We threw coal ashes back and forth. A few days later 80 gangsters came. We fought back and five of us were hurt. The gangsters carried sledgehammers. One grandmother was hurt. Another woman had her arm broken."

Gangsters similar to mafia enforcers are available in Seoul for anyone willing to pay for their services. We were told the price is about \$112 a day per gangster. It used to be \$25, but the price went up when the gangsters realised the people would fight back and they themselves could be hurt.

The day after the five were hurt, people from three other development areas came to fight alongside the Ton Wha Dong people.

The people expect their houses to be demolished after the Olympics but they are determined to resist. "Why is our government doing this?" a man asked.

### YANG PYEONG DONG

This is a small community of 13 families who live about 40 meters from the main highway to Incheon. "They fought the hardest of all the communities," we were told. They live now in two rooms of crate-like houses on a seldom used street beside a factory. They lived on land taken by the government when it was extending the highway.

At one time the government sprayed them with cold water in winter to drive them out. Another time on Good Friday Cardinal Kim visited them and got a pledge from the local officials to give the people drinking water. The next day instead of drinking water the police and gangsters came in.

They ask two things of government: "Leave us alone. As long as we have work, we're all right. Give us a place to stay and we'll pay for it."

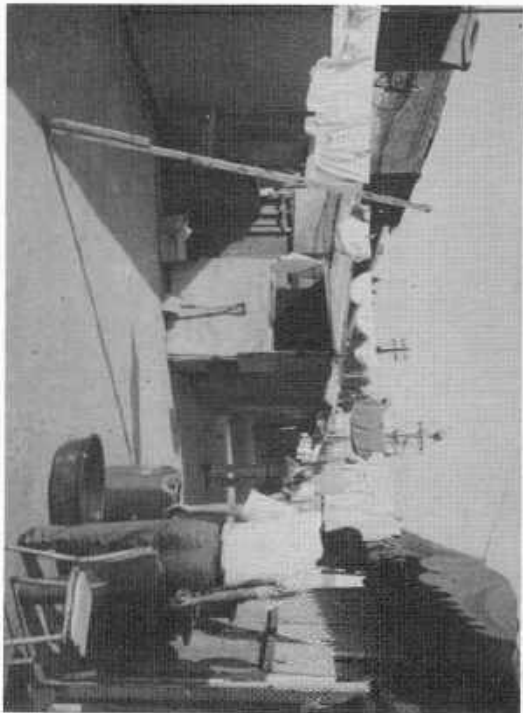
We asked the people why they resist. A grandmother who is 58 but looked older told us: "I thought it was pathetic, women fighting gangsters. I wanted to die. What is the meaning of life if you have to do this? But will we run away? No! It will be more expensive in the end to move. We were not treated as human beings, so we fought. Sure we are poor, but aren't we human also?"

She told us she herself fought because she was old and didn't want the young people hurt. Her son was once arrested, she told us. She visited him in prison where she saw him with his hands tied behind his back. When he asked the guard, "How can I eat with my hands tied behind my back?", the guard replied: "Eat it like a dog." She will never 'digest' her anger.

She didn't condemn others who moved away. "If they have a better place than this, we are happy for them. If it is the same,

we are sorry for them. We have no regrets. If there is no better solution, we are ready to go through hell again," she said. She hauls bricks at a construction site as her job.

As night fell Phra Mahanarong said a prayer commending people to God and the Buddha.



## DON AM DONG

We climbed what seemed like a mountain to the meeting hall of the Don Am Dong people who live not far from the first group we visited at Chang Shin Dong.

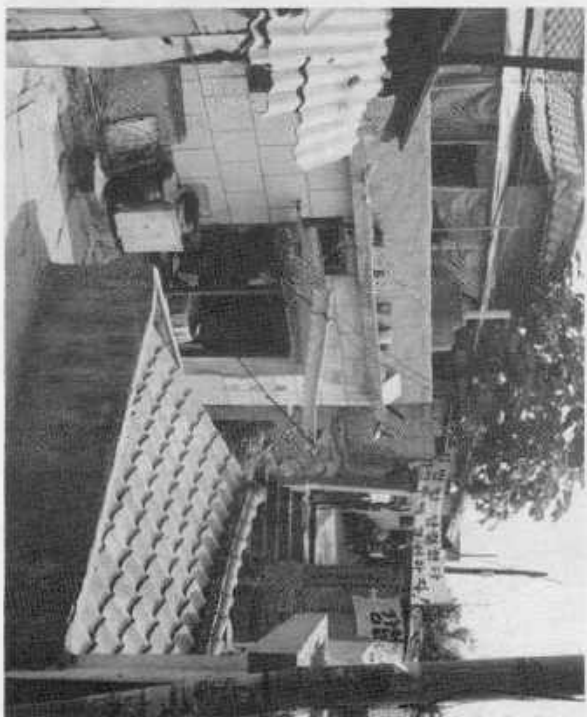
In 1984 some 1,630 homeowners and 3,000 tenant families lived here. Now there are 150 homeowners and about 1,000 tenants.

They said the period before the Olympics was a ceasefire in the war of the government against them. Here, too, many of the buildings had been destroyed by their owners. Some people were highly critical of the government. "It speaks of democratization but it carries out a kind of martial law," a man said. They expect to be evicted after the games.

The people told us 90% of the members of the cooperative are real estate agents or their proxies. Women agents, they said, flood the area once it's known that an area is scheduled for redevelopment, in order to buy up the people's rights to new housing.

"The cooperatives and the construction company use every trick they can think of to divide the people," a man said. "If you can get ten people to move out with you, they'll give a lot of money. They also spread rumours that leaders have taken bribes or misused the common fund. They promise to release people from prison if their families will move away."

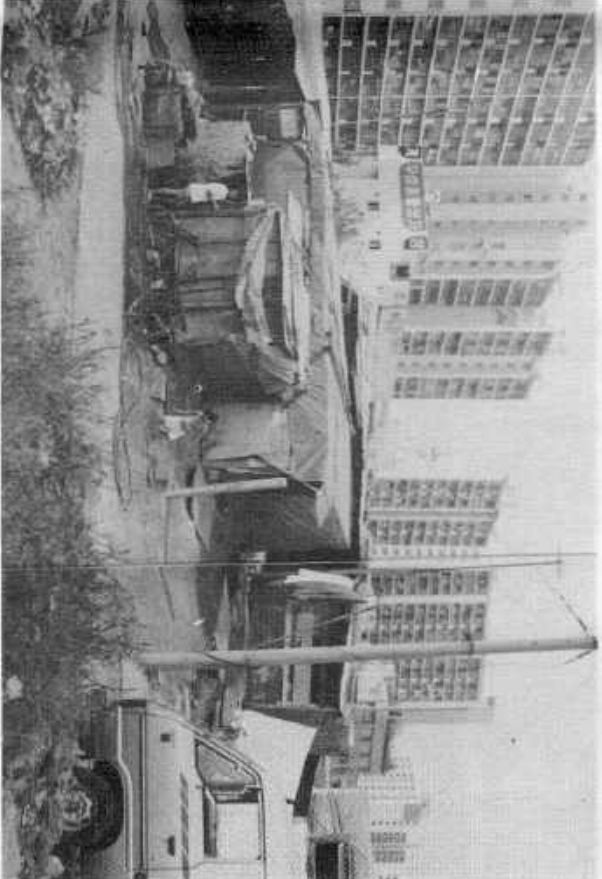
They said they found religion was unrelated to their problems. A man said, "I'm so busy I don't have time to look at the moon or stars. I can't think of religion."





**PYEONG WHA CHON**

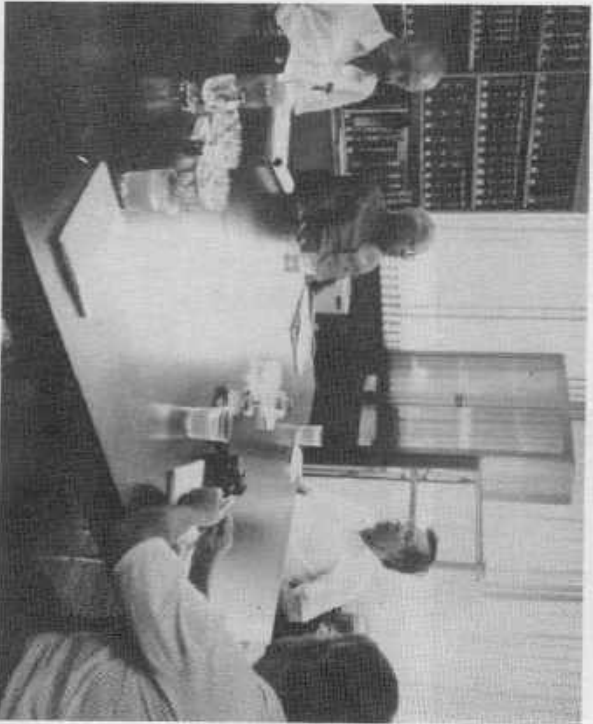
Here not far from the Olympic sites 14 families live alongside new high rise apartments. They have been evicted five times in the past. There used to be 600 tenants and 300 homeowners. The women go out each afternoon at 4.00 pm and stay out until 2.00 or 3.00 am selling native wine and snacks. The government has limited the hours in which they can sell, and will ban all selling during the games.



### MEETING WITH CARDINAL KIM AT MYEONG DONG CATHEDRAL

We met with the Cardinal on September 9. Asked what he expected of the new government, he said he hoped the government would be more careful of the poor, that there were some small indications they might be, but that it is necessary to wait and see.

He said he supported the efforts of Fr. John Daly and Paul Jeon Jeong Gu and others who work for the urban poor.



### MEETING WITH MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND SEOUL MUNICIPALITY OFFICIALS

The officials received us civilly. They agreed that our statistics, similar to those presented in this report, were accurate. They also said they were reviewing the redevelopment program policies, but they wouldn't make firm commitments on the specific points we inquired about, for example, the status of tenants or large scale eviction. Several regulations they referred to, spoke of renters as if they were less than full citizens.

They know there are problems in the way the program worked that must be corrected. The use of gangsters and the obvious manipulation of the cooperatives are two examples. They said tenants may be given apartments but wouldn't say whether these would be at a far distance from Seoul, as the team had heard was the plan.



## WHAT IS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM?

We believe the present program was fashioned into its present shape by agreement between the highest levels of the Korean government and the giant construction companies such as HyunDai, Taerim, W'oo Sung, and others.

Several factors coincided. The construction companies were underutilized as construction contracts fell in the Mideast due to falling oil prices. Government officials needed money for the Olympics and other purposes. The ministries executed the plan: land was sold at very low prices, the manipulation of cooperatives was allowed, and gangsters did violence to civilians unmolesated, since it was clear this was all on behalf of a project blessed at the top. No matter that it was ruinous to the city's housing stock and more importantly to the city's people.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Fact Finding Team urged the Korean authorities:

- to accept the right to housing for everyone, as proclaimed in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and confirmed in Article 11 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as a guiding principle of its human settlement policies;
- to introduce a policy which will enable those who cannot (yet) participate in the market to buy or rent adequate shelter;
- to stop the demolition of existing low-income houses in view of the scarcity of affordable shelter;
- to put an absolute stop on eviction unless, in consultation with the people concerned, and adequate shelter alternative has been found for both tenants and homeowners.

The members of the team concluded that it would:

- publish a fully documented report and a video tape of the visit;
- individually and collectively promote the attention of governments, international organisations and the public in general to the plight of the urban poor in Korea;
- closely follow the developments with regard to the housing situation of the urban poor in Korea.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE?

Perhaps Cardinal Kim's assessment is the best. There are small signs to indicate that things may be better, but we must wait and see.

When we visited the Sang Kyei Dong community in Bucheon City, a young married man told us why he continues to resist government efforts to evict him. His words seem an apt way to end this report:

"At times we were tempted to give up. We were tired of being beaten. But we realised that if we gave up and went away, we'd be alone again and, being alone, we'd be helpless. We determined to carry on. Really what we're doing is forming a community. We're peaceful people. If the government will let us build our houses and live together in a simple way, we'll be happy and peaceful. Till then we'll resist."

Seoul, 11 September, 1988

# Information on The Urban Poor of Korea\*

\*This part is prepared by  
The Urban Poor Research Institute, Seoul, Korea

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Urban Housing Situation in South Korea

The concept of Home Distribution Rate (number of housing units divided by the total number of households) is used to ascertain the lack of housing in a given society. In South Korea, this distribution rate is slightly less than 64% and even this figure is decreasing every year. In the case of the capital city of Seoul (where one-quarter of the country's population is concentrated) the housing shortage is more severe and the distribution rate registers only 51%. However, this does not mean that therefore only 49% of the population of Seoul do not own their own homes. This would be the case if the 51% each own only one home. But in fact, some people own two or more homes, so the rate of tenants in Seoul is much higher than 49% (in 1985 it was estimated to be 60%).

In addition, because the gap between rich and poor is so severe among city dwellers, there are large differences in the size, type and quality of the homes of the rich and of the poor.

Chart 1: Housing Conditions of Korean Homes

Type of Home	Families per House	Space/ person	Space/ Family	#People using Toilet	Monthly Family Income Won (₩)	Income Percentile
Lower Class	3	2m <sup>2</sup>	16.5m <sup>2</sup>	9	114,147	1
					(1159)	
					193,039	2
					(269)	
					239,368	3
					(332)	
Middle Class	1	6.4m <sup>2</sup>	66.0m <sup>2</sup>	5	275,879	4
					(383)	
					306,195	5
					(425)	
					347,357	6
					(482)	
Upper Class	1	12.5m <sup>2</sup>	322.7m <sup>2</sup>	1.3	395,754	7
					(549)	
					451,569	8
					(841)	
					585,042	9
					(794)	
					890,076	10
					(1,236)	

This chart, based on statistics for 1985 released by The Economic Planning Board and the Ministry of Construction, indicates that it is common for the urban poor that more than two families share one household, that one family lives in one (or two) rooms, and that in addition to the nuclear family of parents and children, frequently grandparents live together with them — in some cases in only one room.

The poor people tended to gather mainly on mountain slopes or next to streams or open sewers. Stumps were formed. The government has designated their houses as sub-standard and

carried on a continuous program of eviction. In April 1988, the Seoul City government announced that the number of home-improvement Redevelopment areas in Seoul was 216. It is estimated that 400,000 families (or 2,000,000 people) live (or lived) in these areas. As for January, 1988, 66 of these (216) areas have already been completely redeveloped. In the rest of the areas, redevelopment is already well underway or they are being rushed through the preliminary stages.

## 2. Origins of the Urban Poor and Facts about their Living Conditions

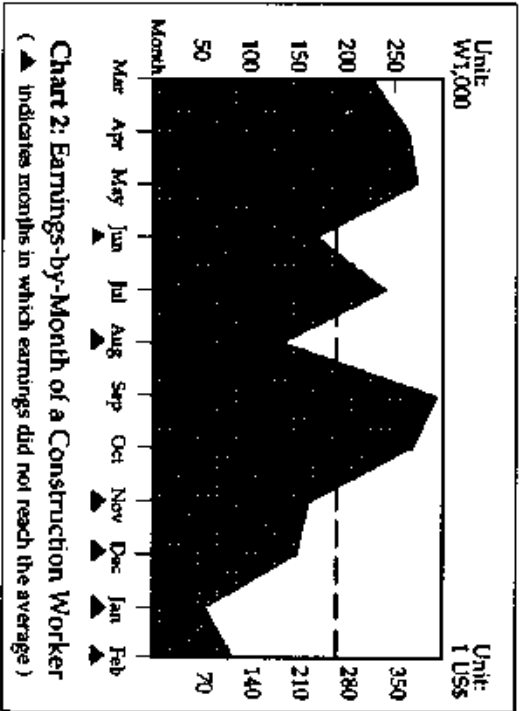
The formation of urban poor areas and the rapid increase in the numbers of the urban poor have their beginnings in the Economic Development Plans of the 1960s. The government's overambitious policy of speeding up industrialization needed abundant cheap labour for the factories in the major cities. The agricultural policies which brought about migration to the cities weakened the agricultural sector.

Since 1960 approximately 10,000,000 people have left the farms and moved to the cities. Even at present, almost every year between 500,000 and 700,000 people leave their farming villages and move to the cities. As a result there is an over supply of labour in the cities. Thus the poor can only settle in the clusters of illegal housing concentrated at the peripheries of the cities. Having neither capital nor special learning or skills, the urban poor find themselves engaged in the informal economic sector.

In most urban poor areas, the most common occupation for male heads of households is construction work, and the urban poor skilled (carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, steel-reinforcing-rod workers) and unskilled labourers supply more than half the total construction labour force. After construction jobs, the next most common forms of work for men are:

street vending, cleaning the streets, gatekeeper or night-watchman at factories and other odd jobs. The common occupations for women are: maid-service in middle and upper-class homes, street vending, working in very small companies or factories and finally, doing piece-meal (cottage industry) work in their homes.

The special characteristic of the employment of the urban poor is that there is no security which guarantees a fixed income.



Although life in the urban poor areas is difficult and burdened with the hardships of poverty, there is nowhere else they can go.

First of all, it is only in these areas that they can afford to rent some kind of housing accommodations. Secondly, the very concentration of the poor in one area makes it much easier for them to find work — since these areas are the first places that contractors and sub-contractors go to find labourers. And

available. The poor help each other find employment by exchanging all kinds of information. Thus, these urban poor areas are not just a place to live; they also perform a primary function of helping the poor secure and maintain their very livelihood. Finally, at the heart of all the positive functions these areas provide for the people is the breadth, depth and richness of the community life (contact and sharing among neighbours) of the urban poor.

### 3. Redevelopment: Surface Appearance versus Underlying Problems

A pamphlet published and widely distributed by Seoul City explains 'Home-Improvement Redevelopment' in the following words:

In terms of areas with a density of sub-standard housing and where living conditions are inconvenient because of the lack of roads, parks, city water and sewerage facilities and where there is danger of disasters from fire or flooding.

Home Improvement Development is a project making the home environment clean and more convenient, and beautifying the whole city by:

- 1) constructing straight and wide roads, children's playgrounds, city water/sewerage/and other public facilities;
- 2) making it possible to acquire my own land through the disposal of public (government-owned) land;
- 3) improving antiquated housing stock.

(Emphasis added)

This looks like a fine and wonderful idea. But the problem lies in who enjoys the benefits accruing from the implementation of this 'good' idea.

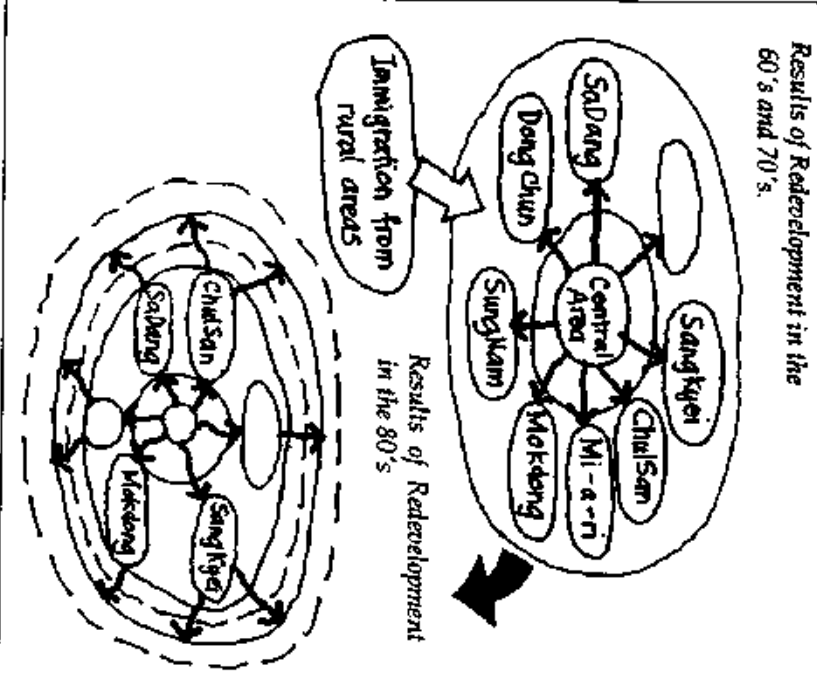
From the 1960s on, the government has steadily executed redevelopment projects—albeit under a variety of names and by a variety of methods. Although the names given to the projects were constantly changed, the underlying purpose of the policy remained constant: to move the poor people from the center to the periphery of Seoul City.

At one point the Municipality moved people to a site at the edge of the city where the basic structures of 8-pyeong apartments had been erected with city funds—the idea being that the people themselves would finish up the interiors of the units. But because the structures were built so hastily and at a cost of less than half of the price of construction at that time, this project ended in tragedy when an entire apartment building collapsed, killing some and wounding many of the residents.

Even in cases where the government provided land for evicted people, they always failed. The lands were located in remote areas where no jobs were available and the people had no way to make their living. Together with the lack of water, electricity, bus service and educational facilities for children of the evicted people—the people almost always moved somewhere else.

As the population of Seoul continued to increase, the circle of redevelopment/eviction kept expanding, bringing about the phenomenon of people once evicted from a central area being evicted again and again as this circle keeps catching up with them.

Chart 3: The Process of Abnormal Expansion of Seoul City



**The Rise of Big Construction Firms**

During the 70s, monopolization of private capital strengthened through the merging of smaller companies/formed huge construction firms. They were centered around the *jaebol* (tycoons) and their mammoth business groups. (The government had been giving preferential treatment to big business through various economic measures in the order to foster the growth of *jaebol*.)

At the same time, the Korean National Housing Corporation (the official government agency for supplying housing) took the lead in building middle and large-size (27 to 55 *pyeong*, where 1 *pyeong* = 3.3 sq.m. or 36 sq.ft. expensive apartments, aimed at creating a boom in the demand for upper-class housing. As a result, high-price apartments were selling so fast that supply could not keep up with the demand.

It was at this time that the huge Korean construction firms that are so prominent today amassed such large quantities of capital through the construction and sale of apartment complexes. They began to divert this capital to the services industry but mostly to construction projects overseas. But profits they had made in Korea were quickly dissipated abroad. The sudden decline in project contracts in the Middle East in the 80s brought about such a slump that the firms who had placed their main emphasis on foreign projects found themselves on the brink of bankruptcy.

At this point, the government, in order to prevent the rippling effects such a crisis would have on monopolized capital and the whole economic system, rescued the insolvent companies with financial support and attracted them into the local construction market.

#### A Housing Policy Favouring the Middle and Upper Classes

The government housing policy has up till now targeted the upper-middle and well-to-do classes. This is shown by the changes occurring in the size of units being built. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of units of less than 15 *pyeong* has dropped by more than 30% while units between 15 and 30 *pyeong* have increased at a rate of more than 270%.

During this time the government continues to announce a policy of housing loans for the low income sector, telling them

they could finally get to own their own homes. But if we take into account that only those families with a monthly income of at least W520,000 (\$722) could qualify for these loans, and that the average monthly income of families living in the urban poor areas is less than W300,000 (\$416) it becomes clear that this policy was, as the poor people say, nothing more than "rice cakes in a painting." According to recent research, only people in the top 30% of the income-pyramid were able to buy a new home having a 20-year mortgage with an interest-rate of 10% per year.

#### The Mokdong Project

In 1984 the Municipality began the MoDong Redevelopment Project.

The largeness of the scope and scale of the project as well as of the excessive profits, and the fervour of the fierce resistance by the residents as well as the results of their struggle — all of these elements gave the MokDong Project a lasting place in the annals of the urban poor movement in Korea. This was a Public Works Redevelopment Project which was entirely directed by the city. It met with strong resistance from both the homeowners and the tenants. Although the government announced in the beginning that the purpose was to provide a large number (23,000) of housing units at a cheap price, the actual sales-price of the apartments was much more expensive than the construction costs. (Eg: A 20-*pyeong* apartment that cost W6,800,000 (\$9,444) to construct was sold for W21,000,000 (\$29,000).

The tenants in Mokdong couldn't dream of moving into one of these apartments and so in the course of one year they staged more than 100 demonstrations and 'sit-ins', demanding some kind of government plan or policy for room-renters.



In order to avoid the headache and discomfort of being the target of all the criticism surrounding redevelopment, city officials devised a method by which the redevelopment projects would continue but the government would take a back seat, out of the line of fire. This new plan was called, 'Joint (or Cooperative) Redevelopment.'

#### Joint Redevelopment

The theory of Joint Redevelopment is this: the homeowners of a redevelopment area form a cooperative which is the main agent of the implementation process. The cooperative selects a construction company. The homeowners provide the land. The construction firm 1) builds high rise apartments (the number of new units being usually 1.5 to 2 times the number of homeowners), 2) moves the homeowners into the new apartments and 3) makes its profits from selling the excess units to outsiders. The government provides administrative assistance and is recompensed either from the sale of any government land involved in the project, or from collecting various taxes connected with the construction of the new buildings.

Since, in theory, the cooperative formed by the people is the main agent of the whole process, it would appear to be a democratic system. But in reality, the cooperative is just a front enabling the construction firm to make money. As a matter of fact, it is said that in many instances the construction company gives the cooperative ₩5,000,000 (\$6,950) per month for operating expenses.

#### How Joint Redevelopment Affects the Homeowners

Up until the present, at most only 10% of the homeowners living in areas that have been redeveloped have moved into the newly-built apartments. The remaining 90% could not

afford the 'entrance costs' (down-payment before moving in).

In view of the fact that the recently-amended Redevelopment Law now specifies that an area can be redeveloped only if a minimum of 90% of the residents approve, one may well ask: "How is it the people sign up for a process that is going to drive them out of the area?" This is where false advertising, deception and threats come into play. People in favour of the project go around and explain the whole process to the homeowners, telling them "If you sign up for redevelopment you will get a new 16-pyeong home free," or "If you don't sign up, you will lose even the house you have now and will be driven away without any compensation." In this way, the homeowners sign up — either out of fear or because they have been deceived.

Another factor which makes it easy to get the required number of signatures is that outside real-estate dealers, smelling quick profits, flood to a redevelopment area and buy up the homes of people who doubt if they will be able to afford the new apartments. (It should be explained here that homeowners in a redevelopment area receive a certificate — called, literally, a 'moving-in ticket' — which entitles them to buy an apartment without going through a lottery.) A team investigating the SangkyelDong case in 1986 estimated that close to 80% of the members of that cooperative were speculators from outside the area.

These outsiders, then, have the real power in the cooperative, making it subservient to the construction company and a tool for real-estate speculation.

The reality of Joint Redevelopment, then, is very different from the theory. Cases in which the construction company originally promised to build modest 15 or 16 pyeong units, but then built 30 pyeong apartments to sell to middle-class buyers

are very common. For example, homeowners who were living on government land in OkSooDong would need W16,800,000 (\$23,000) as a downpayment for a 31 pyeong apartment. Such homeowners, who are also poor and cannot afford such downpayments, have no other choice but to move into another urban poor area — but now as tenants.

Whereas it is almost impossible for most homeowners to move into the new buildings, the speculators who have bought up their homes make huge profits in selling the 'certificate' to middle class people who, actually, were the real target group from the very beginning.

Recently, the largest and most luxurious apartments are not selling well, so speculators are flocking to the urban poor areas in even greater numbers to buy up the 'certificates' to middle-sized units. As these certificates change hands, an apartment which was originally selling for 1,000,000 to 1,200,000 won/pyeong (\$420 to \$505/m<sup>2</sup>) ends up costing W5,000,000/pyeong (\$2,104/m<sup>2</sup>).

This speculation boom not only drives up the cost of the new homes but has the ripple-effect of raising the price of land and all homes. In such a situation, the only thing the poor can do is tighten their belts another notch. Between 1971 and 1978 the price of land and of housing increased 4.5 times the rate of increase of the labouring man's income; whereas his income-increase did not match the rate of GNP growth. If we compare these two facts, we can see how heated the speculation in the housing market is, and also how this aggravates the gap between rich and poor.

### How Joint Redevelopment Affects the Tenants

The most fundamental problem with Joint Redevelopment is that it completely isolates and marginalizes the tenants. Neither the government nor the construction company makes any provisions for tenants living in eviction areas. The logic: "Tenants own neither the land nor the house so they are not qualified to make any demands in terms of their 'rights'." This logic turns into the following kind of indictment (actually shouted at a group of tenants): "This is a capitalistic society which strictly protects the right to private property. You people own nothing. To ask for some compensation or a (housing) policy is to deny the basic system of our country. You must be communists." "The only freedom the tenants have is to move somewhere or 'resist eviction, get beaten up and then be driven out'."

Before redevelopment homeowners and tenants lived as close neighbours with a great deal of sharing and helping each other. But as soon as Joint Redevelopment begins they become enemies. The cooperative spreads the word that the tenants are delaying construction which will result in financial losses to the homeowners. The homeowners attack the tenants both verbally and with physical violence and demand effective measures to drive them out. The cooperative hires thugs to beat up the tenants. There are even 'companies' who provide this kind of demolition crew who are specially trained and operate with military precision. (The going-price for these thugs used to be W20,000 (\$28) a day but is now W80,000 (\$112).

### A Typical Demolition Scene

On one side, riot police (sometimes as many as 10 times the number of tenants) surround the people, while in another spot 2 or 3 back-hoe machines crush homes while the demolition

crew from the local District Office and the thugs hired by the cooperative 'guard' the backhoes. If the tenants resist or try to capture a machine (to stop the demolition work) the thugs beat them up unmercifully. If this doesn't work, the riot police fire tear-gas. (However, tear-gas is used not only during violent clashes — both in MokDong (1984) and ChangShinDong (1987) tear gas was tossed into rooms where families were eating their meal together.) In one area in October, 1987 the 'demolition crew' went into a house, picked up a 97-year-old invalid grandmother (Kang, Seong Nyeo — born: May 1, 1890), carried her out and laid her on the street, demolished the house, and then placed the grandmother back on top of the pile of rubble.

Following is a concrete description of SaDangDong on Oct 13 1987:

"Eviction-by-force started when two backhoe machines and 200 thugs arrived. The thugs were swinging baseball bats and steel pipes wildly and used much violence. Even when the people were getting their ribs broken and suffering other severe injuries, the policemen present did not intervene; rather, they busied themselves with protecting this 'permitted violence' and with arresting the people for resisting. Some university students who came to encourage the people caught three of the thugs and turned them over to the police. The police released the thugs but beat up the students. The demolition crew returned and 50 tenants tried to block their path. The thugs hit and kicked the women, swung sledgehammers in the air, ripped the clothes off some women and said to one of them: "You f...ing shit ... come here; I'll tear your crotch apart." They cursed the women with unbelievable obscene language. Then one thug said to another: "We'll have to kill one of these bitches so they'll all run away—then we can tear down the houses easily." Their attitude was one of extreme arrogance. The

thugs joined up with the members of the cooperative, split into four groups and tore down houses. They destroyed the children's playground, the toilets and the city water pipes. After tearing down the vacated houses, they started on houses where people were still living, but where no one was at home at the time. They tossed the furniture etc. in all directions. Through all this, most of the people (tenants) were injured and their clothes torn and ripped. The thugs surrounded a Catholic priest who was taking pictures of the violence, took away his camera, pushed, shoved and beat him up." (Quoted from *Eviction Struggles of the Urban Poor*, 1987, published jointly by: The Catholic Organisation of the Urban Poor, the Christian Federation for the Evangelization of the Urban Poor, and the Ecumenical Federation of Korean Churches for Social Evangelization, April, 1988.)

#### Deaths Related with Eviction

(From March, 1986 to October, 1987)

*Note: Inside brackets, M = male; F = female, and the number is the person's age.*

1. LEE Soon Bok [F, 37]: Living in a tent after house was torn down she died from a fire of unexplained origin.
2. NAM Seong Yeol [M, 31]: Several days after being severely beaten up by people trying to break up the tenant's organisation his corpse was found in some mountains. Police listed the cause of death as suicide, but it is a question mark.
3. LEE Chi Hoh [M, 59]: Crushed by a wall falling on him during demolition.
4. CHOI Hong Sook [F, 33]: Despondent at being evicted, committed suicide.

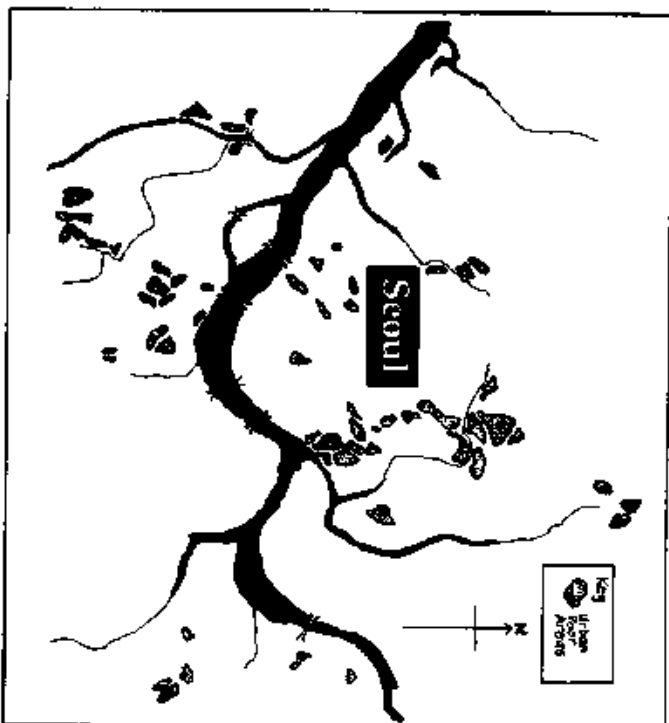
5. **PAK Jeong Ja** [F, 63] : Died from a deterioration of health due to the rigors of living in a tent and from several shocks suffered during the eviction process.
6. **KIM Yu Tae** [M, 27] : A street vendor who committed suicide by burning self to death in the 'Citizens' Complaints' office of Suwon City Hall, protesting the crack-down on street vendors.
7. **CHOI Kwi Nim** [F, 66] : After her home was demolished she suffered severe psychological distress and committed suicide.
8. **OH Dong Kun** [M, 8] : Crushed to death by a wall which fell on him.
9. **LEE Soon Whan** : A suspicious death.
10. **LEE Yeon Ok** [F, 70] : Despondent after home was demolished; committed suicide.
11. **LEE Jong Moon** : Had been in poor health which deteriorated from shock of the eviction.
12. **LEE Kun Seop** [M, 67] : Was very active in opposing eviction. Corpse was found in a small lake.
13. **JI Sam Yong** [M, 72] : Despondent after house was torn down; suicide.

Joint Redevelopment began in 1983. Since then it is estimated that 48,000 structures (buildings) have been demolished. Calculating an average of three families of five members each in each building, then in the last five years 720,000 people have lost their place of residence by eviction.

As the date for the 88 Olympics approached, the winds of eviction blew even stronger. Areas evicted directly because of the Olympics were located in 16 different donges.

Seoul City explains that this was necessary because these areas were near Olympic facilities or the path of the Olympic Torch, or visible from Tourists Hotels — and scenes of poverty should not be seen by foreigners.

Map of Urban Poor Areas in Seoul



## POOR URBAN AREAS IN SOUTH KOREA

### CHANG-SHIN DONG

**Location:** Located on a mountain-side in JONGNO District.

**History:** The area was a wooded mountain before 1950. At the end of the Korean War in 1953 two or three families built the first houses. By 1957 there were 50 to 60 families living in caves or holes dug in the ground. A few years after that people began to build shelters made from clay bricks. By 1967-68, the whole slope was filled with shacks right to the top of the mountain.

The people who came in the beginning farmed. Then the migration from the countryside began: 50 to 60% from Cheon-Ra Province (where Kwangju and Jeonju are); 20 to 30% from Kyeong-Sang Province (where Pusan and Taegu are) and 10 to 20% were refugees from the North.

Most of the residents here have undergone eviction from between one or two to five or six times. Some people who were evicted and forcibly moved to Seung-Nam City (at that time called Kwangju of Kyeongki Province) came here because conditions there were unliveable.

Other areas from which the residents here were evicted: Pok-Moon Dong and Yang Dong in the 1970s; Cheong- Kyel-Cheon and Shin-Seol Dong in 1974-75; Song-In Dong, Ma-

**Jang Dong, Yong-Doo Dong, Yong-San etc. in 1977-78.**

Many of the people here found work somehow connected with the huge East Gate Market.

**Number of Families:**

**Total:** Between 1,776 and 2,076

**Homeowners:** Actually: 576. (But in the beginning the cooperative falsified the figures saying there were 620. Public documents state the number at 586).

**Tenants:** Between 1,200 and 1,300. (It is difficult to estimate because a very large number never registered themselves as residing here. There were a minimum of two to three and a maximum of five to six families living in one house.)

**TONG-SO-MOON DONG/TON-AM DONG**

**Location:** On a mountain in SEONG-BOOK District.

**History:** This is an old and stable village. There were clay-brick and thatch-rooted houses here from Japanese times. In the 1960s migrants from the rural areas (especially Cheon-Ra—Chulla—Province) came in large numbers, cut down trees and built shacks. Except for a small percentage of the people, most families have lived here for a long time and so they have never experienced eviction.

**Number of Families:**

**Total:** approximately 4,628

**Homeowners:** 1,628

**Tenants:** approximately 3,000

**SANG-KYEI Dong • JOONG-KYEI Dong "NEW CITY"**

**Location:** Situated on level ground in NO-WON District, next to the No-Won station of Subway Line No 4.

**History:** People evicted from Ok-Soo Dong and Han-Nam Dong (etc) in the 1960s settled here and formed villages of between 100 and 300 families. With the advent of the new station, the area was targeted for redevelopment.

This "New City" will have 57,000 apartments which are now well under construction (some are completed) by 16 different construction firms (including the National Housing Corporation).

**SANG-KYEI DONG NO 173** (173 = land-registration number)

**Location:** Situated on flat land in NO-WON District (formerly called Toh-Bong District), next to the Sang-Kyei station of Subway Line No 4.

**History:** In the middle of the 1960s the Municipality evicted people from the center of the city (Han-Nam Dong, Cheong-Kyei-Cheon, etc). The government built around 1,500 4-pyeong units (1 room + a small kitchen) on 15,380 pyeong of city-owned land. The structures were single-storey row houses with 10 families living in each building. The land was never transferred to the people.

**Number of Families:**

**Total:** 1,524

**Homeowners:** 943

**Tenants:** 581

**TOH-WHA DONG**

**Location:** Situated on a mountain slope in Ma-Po District, clearly visible from the main street going to Yeou-Eui Island.

**History:** A village sprang up here in the latter part of the Yi Dynasty (i.e. towards the end of the 19th century), in connection with the Ma-Po port on the Han River. The people were mainly employed for hauling (and selling) the produce from the port into the (walled) inner city.

During the Japanese Colonial Period (1905 to 1945) people dug caves in the mountainside and lived in them. After liberation in 1945 the area became a slum with the sudden growth in Seoul's population.

The nearby Yong-San Market took the place of Ma-Po port in job opportunities. When this market was moved to the southeastern part of Seoul (Ka-Rak Dong) in 1985, many people moved out. It was at this time that the area was slated for re-development.

**Number of Families:**  
Total: 4,306  
**Homeowners:** 1,882  
**Tenants:** 2,424

**YANG-PYEONG DONG**

**Location:** Situated in YEONG-DUNG-PO District, on flat land next to the AnYang stream.

**History:** Originally it was a community of refugees from China. When industrialisation began picking up speed, many factories were built in Yeong-Dong-Po district, attracting many

workers to the area. In the 1970s many people evicted from other areas settled here because the rent was cheap.

The reason for eviction here was not to build new apartments. This is a case of Public Works Redevelopment—the extension of a clover-leaf interchange (and a small park constructed next to the new road) at the end of the Seoul-Inchon expressway.

**Number of Families:**  
Total: 410  
**Homeowners:** 70  
**Tenants:** 340

**PYEONG-WHA CHON** (means: Peace Village)

**Location:** Located on flat ground in SONG-PA District.

**History:** Village was formed in 1968 when people evicted from Ma-Jang Dong were moved here. Land provided by the government. Water, electricity and road facilities were done by the people.

**Number of Families:**  
Total: around 960  
**Homeowners:** around 600  
**Tenants:** around 360

**SEO-CHO DONG**

**Location:** Level ground in SONG-PA District.

**Special Characteristics:** Seo-Cho Dong is not (yet) a Redevelopment Area. Rather, it is one concrete expression of the

results of redevelopment.

**History:** Up until 10 or so years ago, the area was mainly vacant land but owned by private landlords. When the government created special and very heavy tax for vacant, idle land, the landlords leased the land out to people who built greenhouses (outer covering is vinyl plastic, not glass) for growing flowers. Thus, Seo-Cho Dong became the largest producing area and market for potted plants and cut-flowers in Seoul.

Around five years ago (although the process really gained sudden momentum three years ago) people started renting sections of these greenhouses to live in. The renters would pay for example, ₩1,000,000 (\$1,388) for a space of 10 pyeong. But then as more and more people kept coming this renter would subdivide his/her space and rent half of it out for (say) ₩2,000,000 (\$2,777) and so on.

The word rent here is used very loosely. The land is still owned by private landlords. But the original people who leased the land and built the greenhouses have disappeared. The transactions are made between the resident who is moving out and the one who is moving in, with no legal documents. The people moving in are "buying" a place to live either until they can make enough money to move out, or until the time of forcible eviction.

Most of the residents move in after being evicted from other areas, although a considerable number have moved in during the first half of 1988 when the price of houses soared up between 200% and 300% and they were not able to pay the raise in rent their landlords were demanding.

**Number of Families:** There are no accurate figures yet. Some residents say 7,000 families; some say 8,000 families, but these

numbers may be exaggerations ....

**Survey:** A very hasty survey of only 17 families revealed some interesting (and perhaps significant) data:

- 76% had moved to the area in 1988
- 65% came from areas evicted in 1987 (and 47% of the total 17 families came from SaDang Dong).
- What they paid for their room:

₩2,000,000 (\$2,777): 5 families  
 ₩2,500,000 (\$3,472): 1  
 ₩2,800,000 (\$3,888): 1  
 ₩3,000,000 (\$4,166): 5  
 ₩3,500,000 (\$4,861): 1  
 ₩3,600,000 (\$5,000): 1  
 ₩5,000,000 (\$6,944): 1  
 ₩5,500,000 (\$7,638): 1

- What was the most inconvenient thing about life here:

Not being able to register their residence with the local government (dong) office: 41% (The reason this is so important is that because they are not registered, their children cannot attend the local school and therefore, have to commute to where they lived formerly).

Not enough water: 44%

**MOK DONG**

**Location:** Situated on flat land in YANG-CHEON District (until last year it was KANG-SEO District) next to the AnYang stream.



**History:** In 1964, people evicted from Ee-Tae-Won, Ee-Cheon Dong, Soong-In Dong, Tae-Shin Dong and Tae-Bang Dong were loaded on city garbage trucks and moved here. In 1968, when Yeoo-Eui-Do (Island in the Han River where the National Assembly Building is located) began to be redeveloped and the airport there was closed, small shopkeepers and street vendors living next to the airport were moved to Mok Dong. In the 1970s people evicted from Cheong-Kyei-Cheon and Joong-Ang-Cheon were settled here.

**Number of Families:**

Total: 7,800

Homeowners: 2,600

Tenants: 5,200

**SA-DANG DONG**

**Location:** Situated on a mountainside in TONG-JAK District.

**History:** In 1967, people evicted from Yang Dong, Toh Dong, Seo-Bu Ee-Cheon Dong (etc) began to settle here.

**Number of Families:**

Total: 2,400

Homeowners: around 1,300

Tenants: around 1,100

This book documents the battle against evictions in South Korea which with South Africa was listed in the Berlin 1987 Habitat Conference as one of the two countries in the world where evictions by force are most brutal and inhuman.

Between 3 and 3.5 million people in South Korea are expected to be affected by this brutality which is done in the name of the City Redevelopment Program.

This book also reports on the South Korea Project of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), the Asian Section of Habitat International Coalition. This project aims to stop the brutal eviction in South Korea and to bring to world attention the whole issue of housing in a new light: as an absolute necessity and a fundamental RIGHT for HUMAN existence.

The Report of the Fact Finding Mission which visited Seoul on September 1988 is also documented here.

This book is essential for those who are interested or are working with the urban poor in the areas of Third World shelter, housing policies and human rights.

*The Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR)*  
is a grouping of individuals and groups which are actively working for the housing rights of the poor in Asia.

*The Third World Network*  
is a grouping of organisations and individuals involved in Third World development issues.

ISBN 9810607517