

The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) was formed in June 1988 by representatives of Non-Government Organizations from ten Asian nations. It is an affiliate of the Habitat International Coalition, an international umbrella organization for NGOs working on human settlements issues. The Coalition has made the evictions in South Korea the subject of a regional action programme and it has already organized a fact-finding tour of South Korea by eminent foreign specialists and has sought to publicize the scale and nature of the evictions and encourage concerned groups from all over the world to express their opposition to it. ACHR is also organizing a major housing convention in Seoul in June 1989 to which it has invited representatives from low income communities from many different Asian nations. ACHR is also setting up a documentation service to allow its members to monitor the actions of governments in the region and their impact on poorer groups. ACHR has received funding from MISEREOR (Federal Republic of Germany), NOVIB and CEBEMO (the Netherlands) and CAFOD (United Kingdom). Its address is P.O. Box 24-74, Klongchan, Bangkok, Bangkok 10240, Thailand.

Evictions in Seoul, South Korea

The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

The scale of forced evictions in Seoul is likely to be the largest of any city in the world in recent decades; millions of people have been forced out of accommodation they own or rent, against their wishes, with little or no compensation or provision to rehouse them. Many households have been evicted two or more times in the last 20 years. This article outlines the scale and nature of these evictions and discusses the forces which have underpinned them.

I. BACKGROUND

SEOUL, CAPITAL OF South Korea, has grown rapidly in recent decades to become one of the world's largest cities. In 1966, it had 3.8 million inhabitants while by 1983, it had 9.2 million in the 627 square kilometre area designated as the city boundaries and several million more within the wider region.⁽¹⁾ South Korea's economy was transformed in this same period from a relatively poor and largely agrarian base to an important industrial power in the world market; the nation sustained one of the world's highest rates of economic growth and growth in exports from 1960 up to the present day. In 1960, 36 percent of the nation's population lived in urban areas; by 1983, 72 percent lived in urban areas.

Seoul has also been transformed in this period - not only in terms of population size but also in terms of its building stock and its whole structure. It remains a primate city in that around a third of the national GDP is generated by enterprises located in Seoul.⁽²⁾ Much of the city has been built or rebuilt in the last 40 years. Until relatively recently, virtually all of Seoul's housing stock was either traditional tile-roofed wooden structures or

low-rise (usually one storey) housing. To those who visit Seoul and who remain in the central area or journey along the main roads and highways, it now gives the appearance of a highly developed city with little link to its culture and its historic past, with the large concentrations of high-rise office buildings and high-rise residential areas.

II. HOUSING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

SEOUL'S ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION - and the transformation in the built environment which has accompanied it - has created serious housing problems. Most poor households in Seoul live in small rented rooms or in illegal housing developments. A rapidly expanding economy plus a boom in building construction helped push up land prices. A lack of vacant land available for development meant pressures to redevelop existing residential areas (including many densely populated areas) and in so doing, to push out most of those living there (usually between 80 and 90 percent).

This is a process evident in many Third World cities. But what makes Seoul unusual is the sheer scale of the evictions which have accompanied it (which have affected literally millions of people in the past 10-15 years) and also the brutality with which the process is implemented. This process was considerably accelerated as a result of redevelopments in preparation for the Olympic Games held in Seoul in 1988. Millions of people have been subjected to forced eviction at least once in the past 25 years; indeed, it is likely that more people have been forcibly evicted from their homes in this period than in any other city

in the world.

Various factors have contributed to this. The first is the high concentration of South Korea's economic activities within Seoul which has underpinned rapid in-migration to the city and, at the same time, a very rapid rise in land prices. Secondly, the Government has done relatively little to increase the supply of housing which is both affordable by lower income groups and in locations which allow them to get to and from work. Indeed, given the Government's long concern to reduce the growth rate of Seoul, the low priority given to addressing growing housing problems may have been a conscious policy to try to control migration to Seoul. As in so many other attempts by governments to control city growth, this merely seeks to control an effect (migration to the city) rather than the cause (the concentration of economic opportunities or possibilities for survival within the city).

A third factor has been the strong government control over the development of squatter settlements or other illegal housing developments; in most of the major cities of the Third World, housing developed in squatter settlements or on illegal subdivisions has provided much of the cheap new housing in the last 20-40 years and has helped both alleviate overcrowding and widen the housing options open to poorer households.

The result of so few housing options open to poorer groups is a high proportion of renters and a high degree of overcrowding in the existing housing stock. If there is little or no increase in the housing options open to poorer groups, the tendency is for increasing numbers of people to crowd into existing dwellings. In 1986, 60 percent of Seoul's population lived in rented accommodation and the proportion in rented accommodation has grown in recent decades.⁽³⁾ In 1985, the poorest 30 percent of the population had an average of two square metres per person and three families per house.⁽⁴⁾ It is common for one family to live in one or two small rooms and often, three generations live together - in some cases in one room. Official figures suggest that 40 percent of the city's households live with one or more other households while in 1985, 24 percent had three or more households living in the same house.⁽⁵⁾ In industrial areas, what are termed 'beehive' buildings have developed where landlords subdivide buildings into rooms of five square metres and rent them out to young industrial workers; the cost of renting is often equivalent to more than half the renter's wages.⁽⁶⁾ The rapid growth in the rental market has helped create what has been described as one of the most sophisticated systems of rental housing, with at least six different kinds of rental arrangement between renter and landlord being common.⁽⁷⁾

Accurate figures for the number of people living in illegal settlements are difficult to find. In 1966,

one third of the population was said to be living in squatter settlements.⁽⁸⁾ Data from the 1970 census suggests that there were 165,000 squatter dwellings which housed some 1.5 million people.⁽⁹⁾ The number of squatter families is said to have declined to 150,500 in 1976, the reduction in numbers being the result of large-scale squatter demolition programmes with little or no provision to rehouse those made homeless.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the late 1980s, some two million people are thought to be living in shelters built illegally - usually on land ill-suited to development, such as areas distant from transport, land near sewers or on steep hillsides.⁽¹¹⁾ Of course, the choice of such sites is deliberate since the poorer the quality or the location of the site, the greater the chance of avoiding eviction.

This combination of a rapidly growing city and a lack of vacant land available for development has created enormous pressures for redevelopment of existing low-rise, high density residential areas. It is the redevelopment of these areas that has underpinned the mass evictions in Seoul over the last 25 years. Many of the areas from which the inhabitants were evicted were long-established communities with legally constructed housing. While the redevelopments usually involved the construction of high-rise apartment buildings and thus an increase in the number of housing units within the redeveloped area, only a small proportion of those who had previously lived in the area received one of the new apartments. The process brought very substantial profits for the construction firms and the city authorities, and increased the housing stock for the middle and upper income groups. But it had a very serious impact on the millions of people who, as a result of this process, were forced out of their homes and neighbourhoods, usually with little or no compensation and no provision for rehousing.

III. 'REDEVELOPMENT' AND EVICTION

IN 1966, THE Seoul Metropolitan Government undertook the first major squatter clearance project. The three-year project sought to clear 136,000 units belonging to 230,000 households and to construct 90,000 public housing units to resettle some of the displaced families. By 1970, some 50 percent of the squatter settlements had been cleared but only 16,000 public housing units had been constructed.⁽¹²⁾ Some households received land sites with no services, at some distance from the city but these were unpopular not only because of the lack of serv-

ices but also because of their distance from jobs and sources of income.

In the early Seventies, the Government changed their approach. With a new Housing Improvement Law in 1972, the emphasis was on clearing and redeveloping sites but with the intention of providing homeowners, whose housing was demolished, with apartments in the redeveloped site. A series of redevelopment projects implemented during the Seventies was responsible for reducing the number of squatters in Seoul but since little or no provision was made to rehouse those displaced by these redevelopments, it also contributed to overcrowding. An evaluation by UNICEF outlined the impacts of these redevelopments. The tenants (who usually made up most of the total population in the redeveloped areas) were evicted with little or no compensation (some received one to two months rent by way of 'compensation'). The homeowners in theory received the right to an apartment on the redeveloped site but, in fact, they usually only received an offer to purchase an apartment at 'a low price' which they could not afford so they sold the right to these apartments to businesses or richer households. Between 1960 and 1980, a total of 117 square kilometres was redeveloped, around one-fifth of the entire city's area.⁽¹³⁾

Such redevelopments continued during the Eighties; a research report from Seoul National University estimated that between 1983 and 1988, 48,000 buildings (which had provided homes for 720,000 people) were destroyed. Most of these were solid, one storey houses and 90 percent of those evicted did not obtain an apartment in the redeveloped site.⁽¹⁴⁾

To illustrate the way that these redevelopments worked, consider the case of Mok Dong. In 1964, people from six eviction sites in central Seoul were loaded onto garbage trucks and moved to Mok Dong, at that time farmland covering some 400 hectares. In 1968, when the 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 near the airport were moved to Mok Dong. During the Seventies, Mok Dong also became the home of people evicted from other redevelopments. By the early Eighties, it had around 7,800 families - 2,600 homeowners and 5,200 tenants. In 1984, it was subject to redevelopment and 3,200 houses were destroyed. Some 23,000 apartments were built but their actual sale price was far too high for local residents (whether homeowners or tenants). The public authorities responsible for implementing this redevelopment made a profit of some \$1,300 million. No compensation was provided for tenants; indeed, they received no help at all in finding alternative accommodation. The farmers who owned the land were paid one sixth of the

market value for their land.⁽¹⁵⁾

IV. THE NEW MODEL - 'JOINT REDEVELOPMENT'

PARTLY AS A result of the strong opposition by homeowners and tenants to redevelopment schemes, the public authorities developed a new model - joint (or cooperative) development. This sought to avoid the kinds of problems they had experienced in Mok Dong whereby those facing eviction had organized over 100 demonstrations and 'sit-ins'. In this new model, responsibility for redevelopment passed to a construction company. In theory, agreement should be reached among homeowners in an area about a redevelopment, with the plans for this being drawn up and agreed on by the homeowners. A construction company also takes part in this process as an "associate cooperative member".

The construction company then invests and builds high-rise apartments - usually 1.5 to two times the number of homeowners present on the site - and each homeowner receives a new apartment, with the construction company also receiving the return from the sale of the extra units. The Government simply provides administrative assistance and receives benefits from the various taxes connected with the construction of the new buildings and, where public land is used, from the sale of this land.

As in the previous model of redevelopment, tenants have no rights at all, even if they make up half to three-quarters of all the residents in the area to be redeveloped. As a recent document produced by the Urban Poor Institute in Seoul commented, the only rights the tenants have are "to move elsewhere or resist eviction, get beaten up and then be driven out."⁽¹⁶⁾

Homeowners also have far less control over the process than that suggested by the model. First, agents of the construction company and middle or upper income households move into areas subject to redevelopment to purchase the houses because of the benefits they will receive when the area is redeveloped; in one redevelopment, it was estimated that 80 percent of the members of the cooperative - supposedly local homeowners - were in fact from outside the area.⁽¹⁷⁾ Secondly, construction companies have bribed homeowners to approve the redevelopment project - often with false promises, as in the cases when homeowners are promised cheap apartments in the redeveloped plan but then find that these apartments are in fact too expensive for them to afford. Thirdly, when the proportion of homeowners needed to form a joint development is getting

close to the proportion needed to allow implementation, harassment and threats to homeowners who oppose the redevelopment become common.

V. THE CASE OF SANG KYE DONG EVICTION

SANG KYE DONG, as in the case of Mok Dong described earlier, developed initially as a result of people being evicted from other areas of Seoul and being dumped there in the Sixties. With the development of a subway system (part of the development associated with preparations for the Olympics) and a new station being located nearby, this became an area slated for redevelopment as a new city with 57,000 apartments.

There were around 1,100 houses on a four hectare site. When local residents organized to resist this redevelopment (and their eviction), they were subjected to a series of violent attacks; between June 26th 1986 and April 14th, 1987, they were attacked 18 times. Around 400 people (about half of them young people and children) resisted eviction. Most of these attacks involved several hundred riot police and several hundred men hired by the construction company to intimidate and assault the residents. Many of the residents suffered serious injuries as a result of these attacks - including grandparents and babies. The cost of treating those injured totalled some US\$15,000 during this period.

On December 24th, the most senior South Korean Catholic, Cardinal Kim, had planned to visit the community to celebrate a Catholic Mass for Christmas eve. On the afternoon of December 24th, an attack was mounted specifically to stop him doing so and two large tents used as community centres were burnt down. So too were all the items stored in the tents. The site was then dug up to prevent the Cardinal celebrating the Mass, and the city water pipes used by the residents were destroyed and the electricity connections cut off. As in previous attacks, the local police were also there and did nothing to halt what was a violent attack organized by a private company on a group of people, and the illegal destruction of private property.

On April 14th, 1987, a force of 3,500 people and 77 trucks moved into the area - against 380 citizens. The belongings of the residents were loaded onto the trucks and driven away. The tent headquarters was demolished and the residents carried off the area. Wide trenches were dug at the entrances to the area and large barricades erected to prevent re-entry. Riot police and guards hired by the construction company remained to guard the site.

The former residents lived for ten months in tents set up in the grounds of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in central Seoul. With the political changes which saw a move towards democracy, the public authorities appeared to have become less intransigent. A plot of land was provided for the Sang Kye Community members - but when they moved there and began to erect their dwellings these were torn down by the local authorities. The people were refused permission to build their houses because the plot they had been allocated happened to be in sight of the road where the Olympic torch was to be carried in September 1988. The residents were forced to dig holes in the ground, in which they lived for the worst of the winter months and then, with the advent of the rains, they lived in plastic shelters.⁽¹⁸⁾

VI. HOUSING AND THE OLYMPICS

APART FROM THE pressures on redevelopment already mentioned, another factor became important during the Eighties - the preparation for the Olympic Games in 1988. This meant not only a need for land for all the sports stadia and other venues for competitions but also for accommodation for the participants and the press and hotels and other tourist facilities needed for visitors. In addition, there was strong support from the Government for other 'rehabilitation' and 'beautification' projects which were seen as important in enhancing the image of South Korea internationally. This led to a large demolition and redevelopment programme - to provide land for all the new developments and to remove what the Government considered 'slums' or unsightly areas where these were visible from main roads or Olympic facilities or hotels. These large-scale redevelopment schemes, beginning with Mok Dong, also provided capital to finance the construction of Olympic facilities. During the spring and summer of 1988, many communities were evicted from sites, simply because they were next to the path along which the Olympic torch was to be carried and the public authorities did not want these communities to be visible to the reporters and television cameras following the path of the torch.

One additional reason for the scale of redevelopment was the power of the large construction companies and their need to find more work within South Korea, as their volume of work overseas decreased. The scale of work undertaken by South Korean construction companies working overseas (largely in the Middle East) had grown very rapidly during the Sixties and Seven-

ties and by 1981, they had come to represent the world's second largest contractor. With the decline in business in the Middle East, they looked to more work in South Korea and the Olympics provided the focus.

VII. THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE DOES not look promising for lower income groups living in Seoul. There seems to have been a temporary truce, just before and during the Olympic Games, presumably to prevent protests during the Games themselves. Between 1982 and 1988, around 250 sites within Seoul were designated as 'redevelopment areas' and, of these, around 100 have already been developed. An estimated 3 to 3.5 million people live in these 250 sites.

An article in the magazine *Housing and Property* published in Malaysia in 1988 summarizes the current prospects. "No-one knows how many thousands of people have been displaced as neighbourhoods of one storey houses are levelled for new apartment buildings. It is claimed by activists that 230 redevelopment projects announced by the city since 1985 would displace more than 3 million people (nearly 30 percent of the city's population) by the early 1990s. City officials concede that 550,000 people will be displaced by redevelopment, although they hasten to add that at least some of these people will move back to their former neighbourhoods once the renovation is complete... the Government says that this is a private matter between the tenants and the construction companies; but there are often riot police, the head of the local police and investigators taking pictures of people who resist. How can a private construction company order riot police? It's a total war against the urban poor."⁽¹⁹⁾

With so few options open to poorer groups, some strange and unusual rental markets are developing. For instance, in one area of the city (Seo Cho Dong), greenhouses formerly used to produce pot plants and cut flowers are now being rented out to families to live in. Most of the people moving there had been evicted from other areas. Some 8,000 families are estimated to be living there in late 1988.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

BOTH THE NATIONAL government agencies and the city government are fortunate in that with a strong economy and no shortage of resources or technical skills, there is no reason why the serious housing problems faced by poorer groups cannot

be tackled. But to do this demands the recognition of certain facts.

The first is that all citizens in Seoul need accommodation. Those who are tenants are not 'second class citizens' even though, by implication, the fact that tenants have no rights within a redevelopment area implies that they are treated as second class citizens. The Government cannot simply designate an area as suited to redevelopment and then do nothing to house the majority (the tenants) who are displaced by the redevelopment. The 60 percent of Seoul's population who do live in rented accommodation contribute much to the city's prosperity; ironically, many of the tenants displaced by redevelopment schemes actually make a living as construction workers.

At present, the redevelopment schemes create large benefits for the construction companies and large costs for the people displaced by the redevelopment; in the end, it is the Government which has to confront these costs. In fact, by not demanding that construction companies make provision for tenants who will be displaced by the redevelopment, they are creating additional problems for themselves.

There are more constructive ways of organizing redevelopment which recognize that, as a city develops as rapidly as Seoul, certain areas can be redeveloped - to densities which reflect their higher value. But the process by which the redevelopment is organized must involve residents (both homeowners and tenants) and, in the end, be subject to their control. One of the most serious hidden costs of the current 'redevelopment' model is the destruction not only of the physical environment but also of the social ties and networks which had developed in the locality. In many cities, redevelopments have been achieved which increased the densities of development but did so more gradually and incrementally in ways which did not destroy these social networks and did not displace most or all of the original residents.

Perhaps one of the more worrying lessons from this experience with redevelopment in Seoul is the implications for other Third World cities. The continuous and large-scale redevelopment of existing city areas accompanied by mass evictions of their residents is no more than a reflection of market forces at work in an increasingly prosperous and rapidly growing city. It happened on such a large scale in Seoul because the city's prosperity and population grew so rapidly - in the absence of government policies either to support the rights of poorer households or to ensure that poorer households could buy, rent or build adequate, reasonably priced housing. What has happened, and continues to happen, in Seoul is already happening in many other Third World

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cities - although on much smaller scales. But the example of Seoul can provide a pointer to what is likely to happen in other rapidly growing cities with

dynamic economic bases, in the absence of strong, effective government policies to ensure poorer groups find adequate accommodation.

Notes and References

1. The Seoul Metropolitan Area covers 4,395 square kilometres and includes the city of Seoul plus four cities and five counties which surround it; it also includes Incheon and Suwon, two nearby cities and two additional counties. It had 13 million people in 1983. Data drawn from *Population Growth and Policies in Mega-Cities: Seoul*, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, ST/ESA/SER.R/64, (1986). Note however that this metropolitan area is designated for planning purposes only. Administratively, the jurisdiction of the "Seoul Metropolitan Government" is the city of Seoul itself.
2. Background paper prepared by Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, January 1988.
3. Urban Poor Institute (1988), *Information Packet on the Urban Poor of Korea*, Seoul, South Korea.
4. Based on statistics for 1985 released by the Economic Planning Board and the Ministry of Construction, quoted in - Urban Poor Institute, *Information Packet on the Urban Poor of Korea* (1988), Seoul, South Korea.
5. Official figures quoted in *SELAVIP* newsletter (Latin American and Asian Low Income Housing Service/Servicio Latino Americano y Asiatico de Vivienda Popular), Tokyo, September 1988 and Urban Poor Institute (1988) see note 3.
6. Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Disposable People: Forced Evictions in South Korea*, available from CIIR, 22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF, United Kingdom, £6.50.
7. *SELAVIP*, see note 5 and Gill-Chin Lim, James Follain and Bertrand Renaud, (1980), 'Determinants of Homeownership in a Developing Economy: The Case of Korea', *Urban Studies* 17, 13-22.
8. Eui-Won Kim (1982), *A History of National Physical Planning in Korea*, Seoul, Daehakdosso, p. 859 quoted in note 3 of Lee Tae-Il, 'Land Readjustment in Seoul - case study on Gaepo Project' (1987), *Third World Planning Review* Volume 9, no. 3, August.
9. 1970 census, figures quoted in Peter H. Freeman (Editor) (1974), *The Urban Environment in Seoul*, Korea (A case study of the impact of rapid urbanization), Office of International and Environmental Programmes, Smithsonian Institute.
10. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (1986), *Study and Review of the Human Settlements Situation in Asia and the Pacific*, Volume 2, Country Monographs.
11. *Disposable People* see note 6.
12. *ESCAP* see Note 10.
13. *ACHR* background paper see Note 2.
14. Urban Poor Institute, see Note 3.
15. Information on Mok Dong drawn from *Information Packet on the Urban Poor of Korea* (see Note 3) and *Disposable People* (see Note 6).
16. Urban Poor Institute, see Note 3.
17. Urban Poor Institute, see Note 3.
18. Information on Sang Kye Dong drawn from *Information Packet on the Urban Poor of Korea* (see Note 3) and *Disposable People* (see Note 6).
19. *Housing and Property*, October 1988, Malaysia.