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Adoptees call for end to international adoption

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Members of adoptee-led organizations call for an immediate end to international adoption at Gwanghwamun Square, Wednesday. / Courtesy of Kim Joon-young

Death of deported Korean adoptee Philip Clay ignites demands to end industrialized adoption practices

By You Soo-sun

Adoptee-led organizations called on the Korean government to immediately end the "industrialized international adoption" system here during a press conference in central Seoul on Wednesday.

The joint declaration, written at the University of California Irvine and addressed to the U.S. State Department, was submitted at 3:00 p.m. at Gwanghwamun Square in central Seoul. In the wake of the recent death of deported Korean adoptee Philip Clay, members further stressed the need to prevent deportation and enhance the protection of rights for all adoptees.

John Compton, internal adviser at Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L), has been active in advocating for deported adoptees including Clay. He started working with deported adoptees in 2013 and continues to maintain contact with eight of the adoptees.

He said although "15 years have passed since the issue was brought to light, there is still no change in policies, procedures, or programs — for them in this system." Compton said he took the initiative to have Clay's remains sent to the U.S., by locating and contacting Clay's adoptive family and communicating with the Korean government and the U.S. Embassy.

He wondered why the Korean government or the adoption agency that facilitated his adoption did not take such measures. On Thursday, a small departure vigil will be held at Incheon International Airport before his remains are sent to the U.S.

The declaration, signed by scholars and members of various adoptee groups including KoRoot, Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK) and the Adoption, Naturalization, Deportation and Return (AND), further urged the government to enhance support for unwed mothers, improve adoption services, centralize adoption records and provide deported adoptees in Korea with adequate welfare services. They also asked the government to launch a task force to prevent the deportation of adoptees and protect the rights of all adoptees returning to Korea.

One of the key issues addressed was the poor management and preservation of records, which is often denied to adoptees even upon request.

The problem has resulted from the industrialization of international adoption here as stakeholders to create more demand for adopting rather than prioritizing protecting the child.

Records were largely kept and managed by adoption agencies and orphanages, many of which no longer exist and hence have led to inaccurate accounts of those who have been adopted. This has affected those who face citizenship issues in the U.S., Australia and other Western countries.

"The Korean government has known about the problem since the 1990s — they had earlier plans to address this issue by working with the U.S.," Compton said. "Now is the time to come up with a plan to correct it."



Kristin Pak, a representative of Adoption Solidarity Korea, reads out the adoptee groups' joint statement calling for an immediate termination of the international adoption system in Korea. / Korea Times by You Soo-sun