

2001 International Conference on Volunteer Administration

Volunteerism in Korea

**Speech given by Lee Dae Kun,
Director of the Federation for Volunteer Efforts in Korea, Inc.**

Volunteerism as a concept of mutual help had existed already in the olden times in our history for more than 1,000 years—helping one another with farming, building and renovating houses and so on. Occasions of marriage and funeral were not exceptions. The beautiful tradition had long existed and remained as a part of our life even today.

Even if there were many good-hearted people helping the needy and social welfare institutions such as orphanages, home for the aged and handicapped for free, for a long time they were not called volunteers but merely understood as “good-hearted people.”

When the Red Cross movement started in the 1960s, it contributed to organized volunteer activities, but it was still very limited to areas such as relief work and disaster.

In the early 1960s, the English word of “volunteer” was first introduced into our country when universities established [courses] for “social work” of American theory. The word “volunteer” was always used among people involved in social work and volunteer services until our own word “Jawon Bongsu” for volunteer was found in the 1970s. When recruiting and training volunteers, the trainers always began to explain the meaning of the English word “volunteer” to transmit the principles of volunteerism. But now the English word is only seen in books and used when teaching social welfare and volunteerism in school.

Therefore, we can say that volunteer, as a modern concept, was not recognized until the 1970s. Around that period a few voluntary

organizations were established and committed to development of volunteerism in our country. In addition, the Seoul Olympic Games were supported by a large number of volunteers in 1988 and contributed very much to boost volunteerism in Korea.

Recently, volunteerism is regarded with increasing importance in view of rapid social change, especially social problems such as youth problems, environmental issues, crimes in relation to urbanization, and also the increasing number of the aged and the retired.

Traditionally, volunteer services in our country focused on the social welfare institutions, but today volunteer activities have spread to very broad areas and almost every sector of our society, involving education, culture, environmental issues, disaster, health/medical care and the public sector. These volunteer activities are being carried out by volunteer organizations (centers), groups, social welfare organizations, universities, schools, and religious groups.

VOLUNTEERING IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

In 1995 the educational authorities adopted the “Student Service Program” for the purpose of teaching humanity for youth into middle school education, which required 60 hours per year. Now the number of hours is decreased to 20 hours, and the program is included in the extracurricular. The reason was that students did not have enough time to do so much volunteer activities in a year. My opinion is that students are not too busy

with their school work to do so much volunteer service, but there was a lack of an effective supporting system for the "Student Service Program."

For high school students it is not a requirement, but the number of high schools that require certain hours of volunteer activities is on the rise. Also the number of universities teaching volunteer [management] is increasing, and the Campus Compact was established in 1996.

SITUATION OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

During the last 10 years of time, several volunteer organizations and about 190 volunteer centers throughout the country have been established. Half of the centers are run by the administrative authorities and the rest by non-profit organizations and religious groups. All volunteer centers receive more or less financial support from the authorities, but the amount is only a small portion of their total budgets.

CORPORATION VOLUNTEERING

We had several relatively large volunteer programs by some major corporations, but it has now very much shrunk due to recent tough economic situations.

SITUATION OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

As the number of volunteer organizations, including volunteer centers, have rapidly increased and through their efforts focused mostly on recruiting and training volunteers, the number of volunteers has very much increased. One recent survey shows 14 percent of the total population. Naturally, the problem of how to manage volunteers has emerged, and training programs and workshops for volunteer leaders were initiated here and there by volunteer organizations.

In September 1999, the Academy Course for the Volunteer Administrator, the first of its kind in our country, was established by the Federation of Volunteer Efforts in Korea. The

course was endorsed by the Association for Volunteer Administration. The course lasts for three months and consists of lectures, report writing, practical training, workshops, and a paper test. Application requirements for the course include volunteer experience of more than 500 hours. Qualified social workers and school teachers who are in charge of their volunteer program are also eligible. Now the seventh Academy Course is underway.

The Certificate of Qualification as Volunteer Administrator is given by the federation to those who successfully complete the course. The number of volunteer administrators who have completed the course now reaches to almost 500 throughout the country. As a result, the Korea Association of Volunteer Administrators (KAVA) was established with support from the academy last year.

Slowly, but steadily, the people who are involved in volunteerism are beginning to understand the importance of the role of the volunteer administrator. However, it will take much more time until it is positioned as a profession. A majority of people still consider that volunteer activity is the use of one's free time rather than a social responsibility as a citizen.

Since we have just sown the seed of volunteer administration, it will be a challenge for us how to take good care of it for the healthy growth and flowering in the future.

Therefore, international cooperation is very much desirable in terms of promoting volunteer administration. As you may know, the first AVA Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, sponsored jointly by AVA and the Federation for Volunteer Efforts in Korea, will be held in Pusan in April 2002. Twenty-six countries in the region have already showed interest in participation, which is very encouraging.

We are going to use the Pusan AVA International Conference as a valuable opportunity to help people realize the importance of volunteer administration.

Finally, we are sure you will greatly contribute to the promotion of volunteer administration by joining us and sharing your noble expertise, experiences, knowledge, and skill with volunteers in the region. We will be looking forward to meeting all of you once again in our beautiful city—the city full of hospitality—Pusan.