

**16 October 2015**

**Urgent Appeal to**

- The UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights

**Re: Republic of Korea - Government-issued History Textbooks**

Dear Ms. Farida Shaheed,

We are writing to you today to express our grave concerns over the announcement made by the Government of the Republic of Korea on 12 October 2015 that the Government will issue middle school history textbooks and high school Korean history books from 2017. Currently, there are eight different types of history textbooks and they are examined by the National Institute of Korean History before being published. We note with serious concern that the Government-issued history textbooks will result the history being written in a way to idealize the history of military dictatorships and indoctrinate people with a standardized history.

The current Minister of Education, Hwang Woo-yea, said that “it was an inevitable choice in order to eventually realise national cohesion by ending social disputes based on ideological bias and to correct the history”. However, we are all well aware that it is a misconception that there is only one objective truth concerning history. In 1992, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Korea also ruled that “in the case of Korean history, it is difficult to confirm that one theory is an absolute truth, and when different interpretations exist with valid background, it is essential to present different views.” Article 31(4) of the Constitution stipulates “Independence, professionalism and political impartiality of education and the autonomy of institutions of higher learning shall be guaranteed under the conditions as prescribed by law.”

The Government-issued history textbooks create more confusion and ideological conflicts in a society. Most historians announced that they oppose the Government-issued history books and refuse to be authors of the textbooks. As a result, only Government friendly historians will be

authors. In response to the Government's decision, history and social science professors, teachers of elementary school, middle school and high school, politicians, 14 Superintendents of Education out of 17, and civil society organisations officially and heavily criticised the Government's plan to issue official history textbooks. In addition, on 12 October 2015, around 15 university students were arrested by the police while protesting against Government-issued history textbooks.

We would like to draw the special attention of the Special Rapporteur on this issue. As you pointed out in the report presented to the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in 2013, the accreditation of one single history textbook is problematic and State-sponsored textbooks carry the risk of being highly politicized. We would appreciate it if you could strongly remind the Government of the Republic of Korea of the importance of diverse history textbooks and urge them to withdraw their decision on the Government-issued history textbook.

If you have any questions or need clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Gayoon Baek ([pspdint@pspd.org](mailto:pspdint@pspd.org), +82 (0)2 723 4250) at any time. We hope this will help in your work.

Yours Sincerely,



CHUNG Hyun-back

Co-Representative

People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy

**People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)**

PSPD is a non-governmental organization based in Seoul, South Korea. We were founded in 1994 and has been working on promoting people's participation in government's decision making process and socio-economic reforms. PSPD has ECOSOC consultative status since 2004.