**Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change on “Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of mitigation, adaptation, and financial actions to address climate change, with particular emphasis on loss and damage”**

**Republic of Korea**

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**1. Climate Change and Children’s Health**

In the Republic of Korea, climate change is affecting children’s health both directly and indirectly.

1. Climate change has now reached a point where the abnormal climate is hindering the cultivation of crops that people have taken for granted for centuries. The Republic of Korea is specifically experiencing changes in production[[1]](#footnote-1), pests, and weed distribution[[2]](#footnote-2) by crop due to climate change, including an increase in temperature, a decrease in sunlight, and an increase in drought. The supply and demand difficulties of crops due to the abnormal climate are getting worse, contributing to a substantial increase in prices[[3]](#footnote-3). Children have started to experience an imbalance in their diet; such deficits may lead to various adverse outcomes and illnesses in the long run. Children in low-socioeconomic status (SES) households are more vulnerable to such imbalance as they cannot afford crops that have prices jumped unexpectedly. This leads them to choose products that are cheap and not very nutritious.
2. The worsening climate change and pollution situation has made children more susceptible to respiratory illnesses and allergies than before. Symptoms of such illnesses could be severe when ultrafine dust (particulate matter) levels are high and Asian dust (yellow dust) storms occur. Experiencing these symptoms occasionally certainly decreases children’s overall quality of life and exposes children to numerous medications from a very young age.[[4]](#footnote-4)
3. The Republic of Korea was renowned for its distinct four seasons. However, climate change has shifted Korea’s four seasons into having long summers and winters with extremely short springs and autumns.[[5]](#footnote-5) Also, during these elongated seasons, people are experiencing extreme weather conditions. Weather conditions that affect children the most are scorching summers and tropical night. In Korea, using air-conditioning is pricy, leading people of the lower SES to avoid turning their air-conditioners on. Usually, if cooling devices are unavailable, the alternative is to open doors or windows. Unfortunately, there is a high possibility that children who do not have access to air-conditioning live in unsafe neighbourhoods. They are obliged to keep all doors and windows closed, putting them at high risk of hyperthermia. Additionally, due to the tropical night phenomenon, children living in homes which do not use cooling devices often get low-quality sleep. Sleep deprivation during childhood negatively affects the child’s physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.
4. Due to air pollution, the amount of ultrafine dust and yellow dust has increased massively in the Republic of Korea, leading schools to stop outdoor activities. The restriction of outdoor activities included recess and physical education, which are imperative to children’s development. As most children in Korea do not have much free time due to tightly scheduled after-school cram schools, known as hagwons, schools became the only place where children could engage in healthy physical activities.

**2. Government Policies regarding Climate Change in the Republic of Korea**

A recent lawsuit, in which 61 children under the age of 10 have participated, claimed that the government's greenhouse gas reduction target is too low to respond to the climate crisis violating the right to life and the pursuit of happiness of future generations and is unconstitutional.[[6]](#footnote-6) They asserted this target was unconstitutional as the government’s goal was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030. Such a goal is 19% lower than the goal suggested by Climate Analytics. Climate Analytics published a report highlighting that to be in line with the Paris Agreement, the Republic of Korea has to reduce its emissions by 59%.[[7]](#footnote-7) Korea’s greenhouse gas reduction target must be re-examined with the purpose to drastically reduce the negative influence Korea has on climate change and for the sake of Korea’s sustainability.

Policies regarding climate change of the incoming government of the Republic of Korea include increasing the proportion of nuclear energy while reducing that of renewable energy to achieve carbon neutrality. Greenpeace Korea points out that extending the lifespan of aging nuclear power plants and building new ones would increase risk, especially when nuclear power plants are highly dense and nuclear waste has reached storage saturation.[[8]](#footnote-8) During the presidential election held this year, many advocates have criticized that not many candidates had a proper understanding of climate change and that they had “poor climate pledges”.[[9]](#footnote-9) Such a problematic situation reoccurred during the general election a few months after. It is evident that people who have power over policies do not put much importance in climate change in the Republic of Korea. However, the government must be urged to confront and deal with this issue as a priority.

**3. Climate Change Education and Children’s Right to be Heard**

Schools in the Republic of Korea lack education dealing with the environment and climate change. It is imperative for children to receive sufficient information to make a sound judgement and to produce an opinion. Current education in schools regarding the environment is often held as a one-time event and lacks practicality. According to a study analyzing the current status of school environmental education in Korea, less than 1% of all school teachers either had a degree in environmental education or received environmental education training.[[10]](#footnote-10) The international society has continuously emphasized the importance of children and young people receiving environmental education as they can become active agents engaging in climate action. It is now the Korean government’s duty to include environmental education as a formal curriculum in schools and simultaneously educate and train more teachers to become professionals.

Children recently raised the need for environmental education through a discussion held by Good Neighbors’[[11]](#footnote-11) and a study undertaken by ChildFund Korea[[12]](#footnote-12). These reports showed that children felt that their ability to respond to climate crisis was strengthened by participating in disaster safety education and activities related to it. However, participants pointed out the limitations of the current climate change education and training which heavily focused on simple knowledge transfer. This method of education lacked sensory information on the climate change crisis. Likewise, the need of subjects related to environment, climate to be included in the school curriculum was deeply expressed.

1. Due to high-temperature damage, the quantity in production decreases. Fruits and vegetables are burned or get rotten in the distribution process. Park, Y & Park, H. (2021, July 20). The whole country is a burning kiln: Beware of high-temperature damage to farmers and crops. *Agricultural, Fisheries, and Livestock Newspaper* http://www.aflnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=213822 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the report (Kim & Jang, 2020), the incidence rate of phthorimaea operculella, phytophthora blight, anthrax, white rot in onions, etc. have increased, and overwintering and foreign pests have also increased. An increase in foreign and resistant weeds has also been reported. See here: Kim, K., & Jang, Y. (2020). Review of ‘Korean Climate Change Assessment Report 2020’：Main Contents and Future Tasks in the Agriculture Sector. *Issues and Perspective*. no. 1740. https://www.nars.go.kr/eng/report/view.do?categoryId=&cmsCode=CM0136&searchType=TITLE&searchKeyword=climate%20change&brdSeq=30768 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, the price of tomatoes more than doubled as the supply of tomatoes decreased due to the long rainy season, a series of typhoons in 2020, and major hamburger franchises (i.e., McDonald’s, Burger King) sold hamburgers, without tomatoes for a while. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Oh, I., Lee, J., Ahn, K., Kim, J., Kim, Y. M., Sim, C. S., & Kim, Y. (2018). Association between particulate matter concentration and symptoms of atopic dermatitis in children living in an industrial urban area of South Korea. *Environmental Research, 160*, 462-468.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Korean Meteorological Administration (2021). Press release: Four seasons and 24 solar terms in Korea altered by climate change <https://www.kma.go.kr/kma/servlet/NeoboardProcess?mode=download&bid=press&num=1194009&fno=2&callback=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.kma.go.kr%2Fkma%2Fnews%2Fpress.jsp&ses=USERSESSION&k=ATC202104271102112_053690f3-20d6-4005-b700-009a4e1fd9da.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Park, C. G. (2022, June 13). 20-week-old foetus also sued for unconstitutionality of greenhouse gas policy. *SBS News.* <https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1006784804&plink=ORI&cooper=NAVER> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gerretsen, I. (2021, June 16). South Korea proposes cutting emissions 40% by 2030. *Climate Home News.* <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2021/06/16/south-korea-proposes-cutting-emissions-40-2030/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jeong, S. H. (2022, May 12). Green Peace evaluation of Yoon Seok-yeol administration's climate policy. *Green Peace*. <https://www.greenpeace.org/korea/update/22431/blog-ce-110-president-agendas/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kim, T. J. (2022, Jan 6). Never vote for candidates with poor climate vision. *The Korea Times.* <https://m.koreatimes.co.kr/pages/article.asp?newsIdx=321761> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Lee, S., Cho, S.. (2019). A Study on the current status of school environmental education in Korea. *The Korean Society for Environmental Education, 32*(2), 205-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Good Neighbors. (2022, Apr). Discussion of South Korean children on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change in relation to General Comment No. 26. [https://cdn.gni.kr/data/ckeditorUpload/files/un26.pdf?\_gl=1\*ffh3d8\*\_gcl\_aw\*R0NMLjE2NTUzNDMyMjEuQ2owS0NRandocWFWQmhDeEFSSXNBSEsxdGlONmo1WG1yTFY2RDU4akNIaV9NRTNLS1VBWUJzWWdFZHlmbEpRNEI3YVZKQnhxVjdaSDJmZ2FBdDUwRUFMd193Y0I.&\_ga=2.112331596.932474232.1655343221-810627646.1655343221&\_gac=1.191822424.1655343221.Cj0KCQjwhqaVBhCxARIsAHK1tiN6j5XmrLV6D58jCHi\_ME3KKUAYBsYgEdyflJQ4B7aVJBxqV7ZH2fgaAt50EALw\_wcB](https://cdn.gni.kr/data/ckeditorUpload/files/un26.pdf?_gl=1*ffh3d8*_gcl_aw*R0NMLjE2NTUzNDMyMjEuQ2owS0NRandocWFWQmhDeEFSSXNBSEsxdGlONmo1WG1yTFY2RDU4akNIaV9NRTNLS1VBWUJzWWdFZHlmbEpRNEI3YVZKQnhxVjdaSDJmZ2FBdDUwRUFMd193Y0I.&_ga=2.112331596.932474232.1655343221-810627646.1655343221&_gac=1.191822424.1655343221.Cj0KCQjwhqaVBhCxARIsAHK1tiN6j5XmrLV6D58jCHi_ME3KKUAYBsYgEdyflJQ4B7aVJBxqV7ZH2fgaAt50EALw_wcB) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ChildFund Korea. (2021, Nov). Impact of the climate change crisis on children and countermeasures. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)