

International Symposium on  
"River Restoration Project in Korea: Are We on the Right Track?"

### Welcoming Remarks

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Distinguished guests, participating fellows, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I am so glad to welcome all participants joining the International Symposium on "River Restoration Project in Korea: Are We on the Right Track?" Especially I would thank five guest scholars from Britain, Germany, the United States, and Japan. This symposium can be held thanks to many efforts and supports from "Professors' Organization for Movement against Grand Korean Canal" for their effort to prepare today's event.

As you know, the South Korean government is making a strong drive to construct 'the Four River Improvement Plan,' which is a replacement for 'The Great Korea Canal Project' that has failed because of the nationwide opposition. They argue that digging up the river bed of four major rivers of Korea up to six meters and building sixteen concrete reservoirs and ninety-six mid or small size dams could prevent flood, provide more water, and improve the water quality. Compared to the Saemangeum Project, which was the largest land reclamation work in the world and cost one trillion and two hundred billion KRW for ten years, the budget for the Four River Improvement Plan is more than fourteen trillion KRW by 2011. Still, the private contractors expect that the actual cost for the project will exceed well over twenty trillion KRW.

What do you think they are going to achieve by pouring that astronomical

amount of money in such a short time into four major rivers, scraping up the river bed, reinforcing the banks, and building concrete reservoirs? I would not point out the fact that it will directly revive the Great Korea Canal Project back. Also it is very obvious that this project will inevitably annihilate countless lives of underwater creatures, pollute the water in the reservoirs, and eventually destroy the harmonious co-existence of man and rivers. Even building a small scale dam almost always involves flooding old town, destroying forest, and losing good neighbors. How much will we lose with this 14 trillion project?

An Indian writer Arundhati Roy, who allied herself with poor farmers and fishermen to resist the damming of Narmada river, once said that "a development project" was actually a war against the weakest class of the society to push them out. Indeed, she was right. The Four River Improvement Plan is a war against poor people whose lives depend on the rivers. It also is a war of development against our nature. What is even worse is that the South Korean Government tries to disguise such atrocities with nice titles like 'Green Growth' or 'Four-River Restoration,' just as they have called those coercive urban redevelopment projects as 'New Town Development,' which ended up with the fatal tragedy in Yongsan last January in 2009.

But such nice titles can not hide the truth that the Restoration project is the essence of neo-liberalism policy favoring the interest of construction companies and land owners, and that it will destroy our nature only to satisfy their greed. For the sake of all creatures of our land, we must protect our beautiful nature from the threatening Project. Furthermore, we should try our best to change the course of national policy into eco-friendly one.

I believe that today's conference can contribute, both theoretically and pragmatically, to diagnosing various challenges and proposing alternatives concerning the model and strategies toward more progressive society. Insights from the experiences of foreign countries' river restoration project and discussion about those experiences will no doubt help us better understand our situation and future prospect.

Once again, I would like to thank "Professors' Organization for Movement against Grand Korean Canal" for organizing this wonderful conference. I hope that every fellow will have a wonderful and fruitful time at the following sessions.

Thank you!