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A Background Guide in Brief

for the

*South Korean Women's
Presidential Advisory Board*

This Background Guide in Brief is an abbreviated version of your committee's Background Guide, and should provide you with a roadmap for important themes and topics as you begin preliminary research on the committee topic. This document is simply one resource available to you as you prepare for HMUN China, and all delegates are strongly urged to read and study the full Background Guide for their committees. Background Guides will be released on 1 November, 2019. Good luck with your preparation!

The South Korean Women's Presidential Advisory Board is a committee based on contemporary Korea, designed to bring together the voices of prominent South Korean women from across multiple different fields and across various walks of life. As of February 2020, the committee is one of the last few remaining hopes for President Moon Jae-In, the 19th and current President of the Republic of Korea who has gradually lost support from the public since taking office in May 9th, 2017. Despite initial high hopes, President Moon was unable to deliver a satisfactory resolution to the threat of North Korea. His economic policies have proven unpopular, with most of the country being disappointed by stagnant economic growth. Controversies within his ruling Democratic Party have moreover have disrupted his plans to push liberal reforms through the National Assembly. Now, in a desperate bid to salvage his once popular presidency, Moon has turned to his only consistent support base: women. Having once described himself as a "feminist president", President Moon now has the opportunity through his women's advisory board to put his words into action. The board's ultimate goal is to not only prevent Moon's administration from turning into a lame duck presidency, but also to comprehensively address gender inequality that has become increasingly transparent in modern Korea. The decisions made by the South Korean Women's Presidential Advisory Board will have far-reaching implications beyond Moon's presidency and South Korea. Thanks to the appeal of K-Pop and K-Drama, especially in China and developing nations in Southeast Asia, much of the Asia-Pacific region's attention will be

on how Korea works to implement reforms while grappling with its traditions.



Figure 1: President Moon Jae

The present socioeconomic crises that the committee must address are deeply tied to the gender inequality that is rampant in Korean society. Of the countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), South Korea has the greatest gender pay gap, with women's earnings being only 63 percent of those of men. The inequality that can be observed today did not arise overnight. A prolonged period of exposure to patriarchal social and cultural norms, political and economic marginalization, as well as certain historical experiences deeply impacted how Korean women adapted to the modern age. In response, cultural movements such as the "Ditch the Corset" movement have been on the rise in South Korea. The movement is a form of feminist activism that seeks to deliberately go against social norms and stereotypes perceived to be imposed upon Korean women. The typical member of the movement is associated with, "cutting one's hair short (two-block, undercut or even fully shaved off), choosing one's clothes based only on practicality and comfort (as men in general have always been able to do), getting rid of all cosmetics and the everyday rituals that come with having a beauty regimen, not engaging in intimate relationships with men, and renouncing motherhood." In South Korea, where as many as third of all young

women reportedly have cosmetic surgery, the movement is meant to represent the fact that a sizeable number of women are now tired of what they perceive as unrealistic beauty standards.

Moreover, in 2017, South Korea became designated as an aged society when a census indicated that the elderly constituted over 14 percent of the population. This was the fastest transition into an aged society that the world had ever seen. While Japan had taken 24 years to transition from an aging society into an aged one, Korea had taken just 17 years to undergo the same transformation. With the number of working-age citizens who support the young and the elderly decreasing by over 100,000 every year, South Korea is forecasted to have become a “super-aged society” by 2026 at the latest. This demographic crisis has shown there to be immediate significant repercussions and can be attributed to the country’s extremely low birth rate. Another severe issue is the glass ceiling issue. Blatant discriminatory hiring practices by multiple Korean conglomerates are to blame for this issue, and President Moon Jae-In has described them as being a “shameful reality”. Three of South Korea’s largest banks were all discovered to have incorporated highly discriminatory elements into their employee hiring processes, with the banks having regularly manipulated scores in order to favor applicants who were male. In response to the ensuing controversy, the banks have now adopted a blind recruiting system heavily endorsed by President Moon. Nevertheless, the percentage of female executives currently remain dismally low at 1.3 percent.

The above-mentioned challenges are also beset by the fact that Korean presidents have rarely been able to complete their term as president without tragic endings. The majority of presidents have either committed suicide, been assassinated, disgraced by corruption scandals, or jailed for systematically violating the National Constitution and human rights. As advisors to President Moon Jae-In, delegates despite their differing individual interests should nevertheless at least appear to be collectively working towards ensuring that President Moon remains a relevant leader to South Korea and that, in the long term, his ruling leftist Democratic Party is able to continue to defend the Blue House and other relevant executive posts from being taken over by the right-wing coalition. Thus, in addition to being focused on resolving key aforementioned challenges such as the aging population crisis and the issue of LGBT rights, delegates must find a way to leave an impressive legacy for President Moon.



Figure 2: Seoul street