

Remarks on the 25th Anniversary of the Gwangju Democratization Movement

Fellow citizens and residents of Gwangju and Jeollanam-do,

Today, we are gathered here to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Gwangju Democratization Movement of May 18, 1980. I pray for the repose of those who sacrificed their lives for this country at that time and offer my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and the wounded, who are suffering pain even at this moment.

I also offer my deep respect and thanks to the great citizens of Gwangju and Jeollanam-do, who have been leading the development of democracy by sublimating their wrath and grief.

Citizens of Gwangju and Jeollanam-do,

May 18 represents a history of victory. Even the merciless violence of the military dictatorship failed to stem the passion of the Gwangju citizens. The courage and sacrifice of Gwangju became the flame of democratization that flared into the June Struggle for Democracy of 1987 and at last overthrew the military dictatorship. It clearly showed how great the strength of citizens is.

The Gwangju citizens did not lose their composure even under the extreme circumstance dictating their lives. With one heart, all citizens treated the wounded and shared the hardship. They maintained democratic order to the letter without looting, arson or revenge. The citizens tried to the last to promote dialogue for a peaceful solution to the situation. This is unprecedented in world history.

Our people will forever remember that Gwangju laid the groundwork for the achievement of a vibrant, almost flawless, democracy in the world.

Fellow citizens,

Since democratization in the 1980s, the growth of civil society has been remarkable. A community of citizens has emerged as a crucial entity in state affairs, and we have become the nation with the most vigorous civic community in Asia.

Now, commensurate with such a stature, we should pursue development with a more matured approach. Above all, we should elevate the standards of consensus-building through creative participation by presenting alternatives.

The history of dictatorship that did not tolerate opposition and stifled competition with violence and other schemes shall not be repeated.

We should cultivate a mature democratic culture by resolving problems through dialogue and compromise respecting all sides, promoting just competition according to norms and accepting the results without fail. Transcending emotional confrontation, we should pursue a society where rational thinking prevails.

This is the way to efficiently resolve social friction and enhance national competitiveness.

Fellow citizens,

Today, let's revive the lofty spirit of May 18. Let's bring forth a mature democracy and energetically charge ahead in pursuit of an advanced Korea. In that way, let's leave a just and proud record for our children.

The souls of the May 18 heroes will guide us down the road ahead.

Thank you.