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GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS*

**COMMUNICATION**

by

**Mr BAEK Jae Hyun**  
**Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea**

on

**“In the news: Innovations at Parliament”**

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# **In the News and Innovations at Parliament**

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## **Introduction**

Secretaries General from around the world, I extend my cordial greetings to all of you. My name is Baek Jae-hyun, and I am the Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea.

Today, amid accelerating technological innovation and environmental change, we are being ushered into a new era of unprecedented opportunities and challenges.

As Secretary General responsible for supporting the parliamentary affairs of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, I cannot help but notice the following two paradigm shifts surrounding global parliaments.

The first one is the shift in the parliamentary environment induced by technological progress such as the growing use of big data and AI. And the second is the need to reinforce the responsibility of parliaments to address the climate crisis.

Indeed, these changes are forcing parliaments to embrace novel innovation tasks. First, the task of effectively adapting to rapid technological progress and, based on this, promoting a leap in the development of parliamentary democracy. And second, the task of introducing practical legislation tackling the climate crisis and promoting active discussion on carbon neutrality.

Today, I will present to you the efforts and directions of the Korean National Assembly in achieving these innovation goals.

## **Innovation Task 1: Implementing Digital/AI Parliaments**

The Korean National Assembly already has experience of having successfully implemented a “digital national assembly.” Key milestones include:

The establishment of a master plan for parliamentary informatization in 1996;

The introduction of an electronic voting system in 2000;

The launching of an online publication system for parliamentary resources in 2004;

The activation of the world’s first digital venue for plenary sessions in 2005.

In this way, the Korean National Assembly has consistently strived to align itself with the ongoing global digital transformation. This commitment is evidenced by the operation of more than 50 online systems catering to different parliamentary departments, affiliated agencies, topics, and functions, which provide the members and staff of the National Assembly and the public with convenient and timely access to a wealth of parliamentary information.

As an example, our legislative information system facilitates parliamentary activities by members of the National Assembly while also enhancing the work efficiency of its staff. In the same vein, our online broadcasting system for parliamentary proceedings fosters public awareness and interest in parliamentary affairs by offering live broadcasts of plenary sessions and standing committee meetings via both online and mobile platforms.

Furthermore, we are recently working on the development of AI-based systems that go beyond mere digitization of parliamentary information. These innovative systems will enable parliamentary members and the public to leverage the full potential of AI, particularly its incredible ability to learn, analyze, and predict. To this end, we have already established an AI parliamentary support system to aid the comparison of legal provisions and the analysis of similar bills. At the same time, we have launched an automatic captioning system for the live broadcast of standing committee meetings.

On top of these efforts, for the benefit of our parliament and the public, we are currently developing the National Assembly Big Data Platform to collect extensive data scattered across different government ministries and agencies and throughout the private sector. Once

completed, the Platform will enable more effective and efficient analysis of diverse information and the production of high-quality outcomes.

Undoubtedly, the Korean National Assembly is not the only party that is interested in such ICT-based parliamentary change and evolution.

Indeed, during the World e-Parliament Conference 2018, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) publicly launched the Centre for Innovation in Parliament (CIP). This initiative aims to aid in the implementation and advancement of e-parliaments in developing countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic raised interest in non-face-to-face/digital parliamentary operations, making the digitization of parliamentary work a stronger global trend. According to the World e-Parliament Report 2022, 84% of the world's parliaments introduced new digital systems during the pandemic.

The implementation of a digital/AI parliament has become a common interest and innovation amongst the global parliamentary community. Against this backdrop, we, at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, seek to share our relevant experiences with fellow parliaments around the world and collaborate on addressing the critical issues of today's digital era.

Those issues encompass information security, the protection of personal information and intellectual property rights, AI ethics, and polarization caused by digital gaps.

Ethical and effective digital/AI parliaments will undoubtedly ensure the accountability, transparency, and openness of politics. And we hope that this parliamentary digital transformation will pave the way for revolutionary progress in parliamentary democracy.

## **Innovation Task 2: Responses to the Climate Crisis**

Let me now move on to our innovation task aimed at addressing the climate crisis.

Back in 2015 in Paris, at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), nearly 200 countries adopted the monumental Paris Agreement, committing themselves to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050.

Only eight years have passed since the adoption of the Agreement. Yet, today, the climate outlook is more dire than previously feared.

According to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) issued last year by the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, even if governments across the world meet their emissions reduction targets, the average surface temperature of the Earth is likely to rise at least 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2040.

To at least slow the pace of the climate crisis, we need to reduce GHG emissions by 43% by 2030, relative to 2019 levels. However, it's hard to be optimistic, considering the lack of progress thus far.

Parliaments around the world are now being called upon to confront the climate crisis with bold approaches bordering on innovation. Though the climate crisis is a grave and urgent matter threatening the survival of humanity, crafting responses at the parliamentary level is far from easy. Nonetheless, over the years, the Korean National Assembly has made steadfast efforts to enact laws addressing climate change. Initially, back in January 2010, the Korean National Assembly passed the Framework Act on Low Carbon, Green Growth. Subsequently, in September 2021, this Act was succeeded by the Framework Act on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth for Coping with the Climate Crisis, to facilitate a more comprehensive and effective response to the climate crisis and to help realize GHG emission reductions for carbon neutrality.

In addition to the aforementioned legislation, there are various climate change response bills

already submitted to the National Assembly. However, with numerous pressing domestic issues requiring legal solutions, and with the current term of the National Assembly ending in May this year, the limitations of time and circumstance make a comprehensive review of these climate bills and the formation of a consensus unlikely.

Now, I would like to propose the following two measures to promote continuous discussion and practical engagement with the climate crisis at the parliamentary level.

The first measure is to establish a special committee on the climate crisis as a permanent standing committee of a parliament. In the case of Korea, the National Assembly has established and is currently operating the Climate Crisis Special Committee. Still, as a non-permanent special committee, it operates on a short-term basis and has no authority for legislation and budgetary review unlike permanent committees. And this hinders the special committee's ability to produce tangible outcomes.

I am convinced that, by establishing a permanent committee dedicated to the steady discussion on climate bills, and by giving it proper authority concerning legislative and budgetary affairs, we can facilitate more timely enactment of climate response legislation.

In this respect, as Secretary General of the Korean National Assembly, I will push for the conversion of the Climate Crisis Special Committee into a permanent standing committee.

Now, another collective effort we can make at the parliamentary level to tackle climate change is to install the Climate Clock in every parliament.

Created by the American environmental activist, Gan Golan, and a global team of scientists, artists, and climate activists, the Climate Clock shows how much time is left until the average global temperature reaches 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

As of March 25, 2024, we have only 5 years and 119 days left. This means the time left for us to act for the survival of humanity is numbered.

If a child had a fever and was crying out in pain, the hearts of the parents watching and worrying over them would ache in pain as well. They would give the child fever medication, stay at their bedside throughout the night, sometimes wiping their forehead with a wet towel, and sometimes feeling anxious and at a loss for what to do, while thinking: “I’d rather be sick than watch them be in pain.”

Likewise, the Earth is currently running a fever.

We must take care of our Earth — with the mindset of caring parents.

Our parliaments must become the parents of the Earth.

To this end, every parliament around the world must become more actively engaged in climate action.

In this regard, I am planning to have the Climate Clock installed in the Korean National Assembly in April of this year. Actually, before leaving for this meeting, I approved and finalized the installation plan. My intention is to heighten the awareness of the climate crisis within the Korean National Assembly, thereby encouraging the rapid development of practical and effective climate measures.

Today, I take this opportunity to suggest that all parliaments around the world install their own Climate Clocks and join forces to find solutions for the climate crisis.

## **Closing**

My fellow Secretaries General from across the world,

Our rapidly changing world is demanding transformative innovation in the roles and responsibilities of parliaments. Together, let us share our perspectives and wisdom, under our common goal of promoting parliamentary democracy and the shared prosperity of the global village.

Thank you for listening. I appreciate your support.