

# **COUNTRY FACT SHEET**

## **REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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Research Directorate  
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## **1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Official name**

Republic of Korea.

### **Geography**

The Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, is in Eastern Asia. To the north, is South Korea's only neighbouring country: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as North Korea. South Korea is otherwise bordered by bodies of water. To the east is the Sea of Japan, to the west is the Yellow Sea, and to the south is the East China Sea.

The country's total area is 99, 617 km<sup>2</sup>. South Korea's climate is characterized by cold dry winters and hot humid summers.

### **Population and density**

Population: 48, 082,163 (2004 estimate).

Density (per km<sup>2</sup>): 482.7 (at mid-2004).

### **Principal cities and populations**

Principal cities and populations (Census 2000): Seoul (capital) 9,853,972; Busan 3,655,437; Daegu 2,473,990; Incheon 2,466,338; Daejeon 1,365,961; Gwangju 1,350,948 Ulsan 967,429.

## **Language**

Korean is the official language.

## **Religions**

The primary religions practised in Korea are Mahayana Buddhism, Shamanism and Christianity. With more than 17 million citizens practising Christianity in Korea, the country has one of the largest Christian populations in Asia.

Chundo Kyo, which combines Shaman, Buddhist and Christian doctrines, is a uniquely Korean religion.

## **Ethnic groups**

The people of Korea are ethnically homogenous.

## **Demographics**

Annual population growth rate (1975-2004): 1.0 %.

Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births, 2004): 5 %.

Life expectancy at birth (years, 2000-2005): 76.9 %.

Fertility rate (births per woman, 2000-2005): 1.2 %.

Adult literacy rate (ages 15 and older, 2004): 98.0 %.

## **Currency**

Won (KRW)

1.00 CAD = 805.326 KRW<sup>1</sup>

## **National holidays**

**2006:** 1 January (New Year), 28-30 January 2006 (Lunar New Year), 1 March (Sam II Jol, Independence Movement Day), 5 April (Arbor Day), 5 May (Children's Day and Buddha's Birthday), 6 June (Memorial Day), 17 July (Constitution Day), 15 August (Liberation Day), 3 October (National Foundation Day), 5-7 October (Juseok, Korean Thanksgiving Day 2006), 25 December (Christmas Day).

**2007:** 1 January (New Year), 17-19 February (Lunar New Year), 1 March (Sam II Jol, Independence Movement Day), 5 April (Arbor Day), 5 May (Children's Day), 24 May

(Buddha's Birthday), 6 June (Memorial Day), 17 July (Constitution Day), 15 August (Liberation Day), 24-26 Sept (Juseok, Korean Thanksgiving Day 2006), 3 October (National Foundation Day), 25 December (Christmas Day).

### **Head of state and government**

President Hyun Roh Moo took office 25 February 2003. As of 19 April 2006, the prime minister of Korea is Myeong-sook Han.

### **Form of government**

South Korea is a constitutional democracy. The president serves as head of state, the chief executive of the government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The prime minister, appointed by the president with the consent of the National Assembly, is the head of government. The president also appoints the deputy prime ministers, based on recommendations made by the prime minister.

In addition, the president appoints the cabinet, known as the State Council, based on the prime minister's recommendations. The cabinet comprises the president, the prime minister and between 15 and 30 ministers.

### **Legislative structure**

The unicameral National Assembly (*Kuk Hoe*) comprises no fewer than 200 members. As of January 2007, there are 299 members in the National Assembly; 243 of the seats were allocated by direct election and 56 seats were filled using a system of proportional representation based on parties' share of the vote.

### **Administrative divisions**

Korea is administratively composed of 16 local authorities: 9 provinces and 7 metropolitan cities.

Metropolitan centres: Incheon, Kwangju, Busan, Seoul, Daegu, daejon, and Ulsan.

Provinces: Cheju-do, Cholla-bukto (North Cholla), Cholla-namdo (South Cholla), Ch'ungch'ong-bukto (North Ch'ungch'ong), Ch'ungch'ong-namdo (South Ch'ungch'ong), Kangwon-do, Kyonggi-do, Kyongsang-bukto (North Kyongsang), Kyongsang-namdo (South Kyongsang). The provinces are divided into counties, cities, towns, and townships.

### **Judicial system**

The highest court in Korea is the Supreme Court. There are also five regional appellate High Courts and District Courts can be found in 13 cities.

In addition, Korea has a constitutional court, patent court, family court and administrative court.

## **Elections**

Legislative power is held by the unicameral National Assembly (*Kuk Hoe*). Elected members to the National Assembly, of which there are currently 299, serve four-year terms. The president is elected for a five-year term.

The president chooses a state council, or cabinet, of up to 30 members. The cabinet is nominally headed by the prime minister. Cabinet members are answerable to the president, rather than to Parliament. Cabinet members do not necessarily have to be members of the National Assembly.

Korea's most recent election was held on 15 April 2004. As a result of this election, 243 seats in the National Assembly were allocated based on single-member constituencies. Another 56 were distributed proportionally among parties that won at least 5 district seats of 3% of the party vote. Following the 15 April 2004 elections, membership in the National Assembly was distributed as follows: Uri Party 152, Grand National Party (GNP), 121; Democratic Labour Party, 10; Millennium Democratic Party, 9; United Liberal Democrats, 4. Three seats went to other parties.



Suffrage is universal in Korea. The voting age is 19 years.

## **Defence**

In August 2005, Korea's armed forces included the following personnel:

army: 560,000.

navy: 63,000.

air force: 64,700.

Paramilitary forces included a civilian defence corps composed of 3.5 million members.

In August 2005, United States (US) forces in Korea included the following personnel:

army: 25,000.

navy 40,360.

air forces: 8,900.

marines: 180.

Military service is compulsory for Korean men between 20 and 30 years of age.

Conscripts must serve between 24 and 28 months, depending on the military branch involved (ibid.). The government of Korea does not recognize alternative forms of service.

Korea's 2005 budget allocated Won \$20,800,000 [CAD \$26 billion<sup>2</sup>] million for defence.

## **Media**

Freedom of the press is guaranteed in Korea's 1987 constitution.

Korea's main news agency is the United News Agency (Yonhap Tong Shin). Numerous news agencies from around the world also have bureaux in Korea.

Korea has some 80 daily newspapers, a quarter of which are national in scope. A list of major Korean daily newspapers follows. Unless otherwise noted, papers are published in Korean. Circulation figures appear in parentheses.

*Chosun Ilbo* (2,470,000), *Joong Ang Ilbo* (2,300,000), *Dong-A Ilbo* 2,150,000, *Hankuk Ilbo* (2,000,000), *Kyung-hyang Shinmun* (730,000), *Hankyoreh Shinmun* (500,000), *Seoul Shinmun* (500,000), *Korea Herald* [in English] (150,000); *Korea Times* [in English] 100,000.

The Korean Broadcasting System (*Hankuk Pangsong Kongsu*) is a non-commercial publicly owned radio and television network. Other broadcasters include the Public Munwha Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), and the US Forces Korea Network. The Buddhist Broadcasting System (BBS) transmits

religious radio programming as does the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS), the Far East Broadcasting Company and the Pyong Hwa Broadcasting Corporation (PBC).

As of 2003, there were about 18.7 million television receivers and 26.7 million personal computers in Korea. Internet users number 29.2 million.

### **United Nations Human Development Index and Country Rank<sup>1</sup>**

Value: 0.912 /1.

Rank: 26 out of 177 countries.

### **United Nations Gender-related Development Index and Country Rank<sup>2</sup>**

Value: 0.905 /1.

Rank: 25 out of 177 countries.

### **Population below the national poverty line**

Information not available in sources consulted.

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<sup>1</sup> The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value.

<sup>2</sup> The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women.

## **Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>3</sup>**

Score: 5.1 /10

Rank: 42 out of 163 countries surveyed

**(Information compiled from: *The Europa World Year Book 2006; Political Handbook of the World: 2005-2006; Political Parties of the World 2005; TI 7 Dec., 2006; ibid 6 Nov. 2006; UN 31 Oct. 2006, UN 2006, US 19 Dec. 2006)***

## **2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND**

Korea's current head of state, President Roh was impeached in mid-March 2004<sup>2</sup> for corruption, economic mismanagement and violating political neutrality.<sup>3</sup> The latter charge relates to Roh's statements urging voters to support the Uri Party - a new party he and several dozen other reform-minded legislators had become a part of.<sup>4</sup> In spite of a public outcry against the move to impeach Roh, 193 legislators voted in favour of the impeachment.<sup>5</sup> Many of those who voted for impeachment were legislators from Roh's former party, the MDP.<sup>6</sup> In April 2004, the Uri Party won a slim majority in the National Assembly.<sup>7</sup> By May 2004, the Constitutional Court, which had been deliberating on the case against Roh, ruled against impeachment.<sup>8</sup> Roh resumed his office and shortly thereafter joined the Uri Party.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflects the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (159).

Roh campaigned on a promise to continue Korea's "sunshine policy" regarding North Korea - although in a somewhat less conciliatory manner than was previously the case.<sup>10</sup> The sunshine policy, which was initiated by former President Kim Dae Jung, focuses on peaceful engagement with North Korea, as well as economic and cultural cooperation.<sup>11</sup> However, the US perspective on the best way to deal with North Korea reportedly differs from this approach.<sup>12</sup>

In 2002, US President Bush referred to North Korea as an "axis of evil," to the reported consternation of South Korea.<sup>13</sup> By 2003, relations between South Korea and the US were strained over the issue of the North Korean nuclear weapons program.<sup>14</sup> President Roh reportedly urged the US to engage in dialogue with North Korea, as opposed to attacking the country.<sup>15</sup>

### **3. POLITICAL PARTIES**

#### **Governing Party:**

**Uri Party (*Uri Dang*):** The Uri Party was established in 2003 by 37 disaffected members of the MDP party.<sup>18</sup> In particular, these members reportedly disliked the MDP's close ties with major corporations and the party's regionalism.<sup>19</sup> The Uri Party subsequently absorbed the People's Party for Reform.<sup>20</sup> In the 2004 election, the Uri Party positioned itself as a "liberal progressive" party and worked to appeal to younger voters.<sup>21</sup> The Uri

Party won a majority in the National Assembly with 152 of 299 seats.<sup>22</sup> The party's chair is Kim Geun-tae.<sup>23</sup>

**Grand National Party - GNP (*Hannara-dang*):** The GNP is a "progressive conservative" party that was formed with the 1997 merger of the New Korea Party and the Democratic Party.<sup>24</sup> In March 2004, Park Geun Hye became the GNP party chair.<sup>25</sup> She replaced Choe Byung Yol whose leadership had been compromised in a 2002 scandal related to illegal fundraising.<sup>26</sup> In the April 2004 elections, the GNP won 121 seats, thereby losing the majority it previously held in the National Assembly.<sup>27</sup> The party's leader is Kang Jae-sup.<sup>28</sup>

**Democratic Labour Party - DLP (*Minjunodong Dang*):** The DLP was created in 2000 by labour activists.<sup>29</sup> After failing to win any seats in the April 2000 election, the DLP announced it would fight against government corruption.<sup>30</sup> In the April 2004 election the party won a total of 10 seats.<sup>31</sup> The party is led by Moon Seong-hyun.<sup>32</sup>

**Democratic Party - DP:** In May 2005, the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) changed its name to the Democratic Party.<sup>33</sup> The MDP was founded by Kim Dae Jung in 2000 as a successor to the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP).<sup>34</sup> Formed in 1995, the NCNP had previously been the strongest opposition party in the National Assembly.<sup>35</sup> By 2003, members of the MDP became sharply divided between those favouring reform and those who were part of the "old guard."<sup>36</sup> Some three dozen members of the MDP left the party to form the Uri party.<sup>37</sup> President Roh Moo Hyun was

among those who left. Subsequent to Roh's departure, the MDP supported the impeachment of Roh in 2004.<sup>38</sup> In the 2004 election, the MDP representation in the National Assembly went from 60 seats down to nine seats.<sup>39</sup> The DP is led by Hahn Hwa-kap.<sup>40</sup>

**United Liberal Democrats - ULD (*Jayu Minju Yonmaeng*):** The ULD is a conservative party that was established in 1995.<sup>41</sup> In the April 2004 elections, the party gained only four National Assembly seats.<sup>42</sup>

### **Other parties**

Other small parties in South Korea include the Defence of the Nation Party, and the Socialist party.<sup>43</sup>

## **4. ARMED GROUPS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS**

No information related to armed groups and other non-state actors was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

## **5. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS**

An election will be held at the end of 2007.<sup>44</sup>

## **6. ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> EX.com 29 Dec. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *The Europa World Yearbook 2006* 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *PHW: 2005-2006* 2005, 639

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>9</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 640.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 638.  
<sup>12</sup> *The Europa World Yearbook 2006* 2005, 2579.  
<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2586.  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2583.  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2587.  
<sup>16</sup> BBC 9 Oct. 2006.  
<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 22 Dec. 2006.  
<sup>18</sup> *PHW: 2005-2006*, 2005 641  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>21</sup> *Political Parties of the World 2005.*, 361.  
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>23</sup> United States (US) 19 December 2006.  
<sup>24</sup> *PHW: 2005-2006*, 2005 642  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>28</sup> US 19 Dec. 2006  
<sup>29</sup> *PHW: 2005-2006*, 2005642  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>32</sup> US 19 Dec. 2006  
<sup>33</sup> *The Europa World Yearbook 2006* 2006, 2597.  
<sup>34</sup> *PHW: 2005-2006* 2006, 642.  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>37</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>39</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>40</sup> US 19 Dec. 2006.  
<sup>41</sup> *Political Parties of the World 2005* 2006, 360.  
<sup>42</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>43</sup> *PHW 2005-2006*, 2005, 643.  
<sup>44</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 6 Dec. 2006.  
<sup>45</sup> *The Korea Herald* 28 Dec. 2006.  
<sup>46</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 6 Dec. 2006.  
<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

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