

The Citizens' Ombudsman Commission of the Seoul Metropolitan Government held a panel discussion on the plans to reinforce the rights of the people.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government held a 'Panel Discussion on the Performance and Direction of the Citizens' Ombudsman Commission' on October 20, 2022 at 2 p.m. to look at the performance of the Citizens' Ombudsman Commission and the plans on the direction of improving the rights of the people.

The Citizens' Ombudsman Commission of the Seoul Metropolitan Government is a collegiate administrative agency, composed of 7 standing ombudsmen and 30 investigators, established directly under the Mayor of the Seoul Metropolitan Government in February 2016 to find the best solutions on the inconveniences and injustices of the people from the perspective of the people.

The major functions of the Commission are: ▲ conduct audits that are requested by the citizens and residents; ▲ monitor and evaluate the public projects implemented by the metropolitan government; ▲ investigate and process the grievance petitions; ▲ conduct ex officio audit; ▲ operate a grievance jury system; and ▲ handle petitions, etc.

The Citizens' Ombudsman Commission of the Seoul Metropolitan Government performs the citizen audits and resident audits based on independence and fairness, and as an organization exclusively for processing the grievance petitions, is working hard to protect the rights and the interests of the people by operating a grievance jury system to fairly process the grievance petitions raised

from any illegal and/or unfair work processing by the public officials, etc.

Moreover, the Commission is performing preventative activities by systematically monitoring the entire process of the public projects for the Seoul Metropolitan Government's major projects, from ordering to contract implementation, to prevent and detect any potential problems in advance, and in order to improve the effects of the audit, the Commission is trying to prevent any blind spots and to reinforce the monitoring of the city administration by introducing the general monitoring system for the public projects.

Furthermore, a petition committee has been established, as the main department for the petitions in the Seoul Metropolitan Government, so that the people can exercise their rights to petition, as guaranteed in the Constitution, more conveniently.

This panel discussion was attended by approximately 100 people, including central and local ombudsmen, the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, civil society groups, legal advisors, the Citizen Participatory Ombudsmen, local public officials from around the nation, etc., to look at the past performance and search for development directions of the third Commission that began its term in May 2022. It began with a welcoming remark by Yong_Hak JOO, the Chair of the Citizens' Ombudsman Commission of the Seoul Metropolitan Government, followed by complimentary messages from Sun-Chul YUN, executive director of the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, and Choon-Sig KIM, president of the Seoul Young Korean Academy.

The panel discussion was led by Kang-Soo PARK, the chair professor of

Kyungdong University (previously, president of Pai Chai University). Young-Hun AHN, president of the Thinking-Lab (previously, legal consultant with the Ministry of Government Legislation), made a presentation on the performance of the ombudsman system of the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the comparison of the ombudsman systems implemented by the major developed countries and the direction of improving the system for the future.

The contents of the presentation included comparing the ombudsman system of the Seoul Metropolitan Government with that of the major cities in the USA, UK and France, as well as the emphasis on introducing an open-type ombudsman system by allowing more people to participate by relaxing the eligibility to becoming an ombudsman and using a more proactive collaboration system with the city council.

Moreover, it included expanding the areas in which the ombudsmen can participate and introducing an ombudsman system where the people participate directly in order to modify the areas of the local ombudsmen participation and improve the organization. Also, it included the need for the right to propose legislation by the ombudsmen to strengthen the effectiveness of the outcome of the local ombudsmen activities.

It was followed by a discussion between Jeong-Hwa JEONG, professor of public administration at Gangwon University, Min-Chul SHIN, head of the Department of Urban Management Research at the Seoul Institute, Chul-Ho HONG, the lead ombudsman from Gangnam-gu, Kyung-Seuk PARK, executive director of the Korea NGO Association, and Doo-Geol LEE, deputy general manager of the Society-2 Section of the Seoul Newspaper.

Jeong-Hwa JEONG, professor of public administration at Gangwon University, pointed out the problem of the passive and cursory operation of local governments as proactive activities and the strengthened authority of the ombudsmen are considered threats to the local governments, and emphasized to establish a systematic device to guarantee the position of the ombudsmen to extend the tenure from 3~4 years to 6 years, in order to strengthen the independence and expertise of the ombudsmen, as well as establishing regular education and the joint promotion plans through a solidarity organization of the local ombudsmen nationwide.

Min-Chul SHIN, head of the Department of Urban Management Research at the Seoul Institute, presented on identifying with the proposed direction of the systems reorganization, securing the accountability of the citizens through systems reorganization led by the city council, using and reinforcing the internal and external expertise of the ombudsman commission, and the need to establish an effective branding strategy to improve the people's awareness.

Chul-Ho Hong, the lead ombudsman from Gangnam-gu, made a presentation on establishing a framework to resolve the grievance petitions that matches the people's eye level by reinforcing the laws related to the processing of the civil complaints, plans to resolve the people's grievances by actively seeking people's difficulties, protecting the rights and interests of the people that are actually experienced by the people through the systematic follow-up management, and strengthening the obligations to implement the recommendations made by the ombudsman commission, etc.

Kyung-Seuk PARK, executive director of the Korea NGO Association, asserted the need for the governance and communication of the ombudsman commission, at the

pinnacle of the coalition between the public sector and the civil society, the ombudsmen's governance task to consult with the public officials and preparing the appropriate response measures, as a preventative measure against the grievance petitions being transferred and transmitted, and expanding the participation through continuous management and the provision of incentives for the Citizens Participatory Ombudsmen.

Lastly, Doo-Geol LEE, deputy general manager of the Society-2 Section of Seoul Newspaper, proposed the expansion of the roles of the ombudsmen, as an alternative, such as expanding the financial support from the Seoul Metropolitan Government to improve the awareness of the ombudsman commission and promotional strategy, improving the operation of the webpage, the reinforced promotion of various activities and the festivals of the Seoul Metropolitan Government, recognizing the volunteer activities of the ombudsmen, expanding the pool for the grievance jury system, and expanding the role of the ombudsmen for the human rights and the vulnerable, such as the activities to protect the rights of the children and adolescents.

Yong-Hak JOO, the Chair of the Citizens' Ombudsman Commission of the Seoul Metropolitan Government, stated that "the panel discussion was an important opportunity to review the roles and the functions of the Commission, that performs the audit on the Seoul Metropolitan Government administration, investigate the grievance petitions, and the audit work on the public projects, from the perspective of the outside experts and the civil society groups, and allowed us to improve as an organization for the people by searching for the sought after methods for the Commission to develop and improve the rights and the interests of the people."