

South Koreans Celebrate Constitutional Court's Ruling to Impeach Park Geun-hye

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The South Korean Constitutional Court delivered a unanimous verdict to impeach Park Geun-hye on Friday March 10, 2017 after 92 days of deliberation.

The Court had considered five grounds for impeachment as put forth by the National Assembly:

- Violation of the sovereignty of the people and the constitutional state
- Abuse of authority as the president
- Violation of the freedom of the press
- Neglect of the president's duty to protect the nation's citizens and their right to life
- Violation of criminal law, including acceptance of bribery

The Court ultimately rejected all but one of the grounds in its ruling. It acknowledged that Park Geun-hye had indeed abused her authority as the president and determined that that was sufficient to uphold the National Assembly's decision for impeachment.

The Court specified Park's following actions as a violation of her duty as a public servant and obligation to protect state secrets:

- Leaking official state documents (to her confidante Choi Soon-sil);
- Appointing public officials solely based on the recommendations of Choi Soon-sil;
- Using her authority as the president to order a supply contract for KD Corporation, run by a personal friend of Choi Soon-sil; and
- Meddling in the affairs of the Mir and K Sports Foundations (established by Choi Soon-sil to funnel millions of dollars to her personal coffer)

The Court did not, however, uphold Park's alleged neglect of duty during the seven hours she was missing on the day of the Sewol Tragedy in 2014 as a ground for impeachment.

Park Geun-hye has yet to issue a public statement in response to the verdict or vacate the Blue House.

Celebrations across South Korea

South Koreans across the country and around the world celebrated the historic ruling, which was televised live.

Commuters gathered in front of TV screens at Seoul Station to watch the verdict:

(Video source: Voice of People)

People gathered outside the Constitutional Court celebrated the ruling:

(Video source: Korea Central Daily)

Sewol Families and Baek Nam-gi's Daughter Embrace Impeachment Decision



Among the crowd were the bereaved families of the Sewol Tragedy, who quietly embraced each other and shed tears as they heard the impeachment verdict.

Kim Young-oh, aka Yumin's dad, who waged a 40-day hunger strike in 2014 to demand the passage of a special law to investigate the Sewol tragedy, was also in tears. "I can't express how happy I am," he said. "This is a reward for all the times we endured the cold and the heat out on the streets. Now that we've impeached her, we have to put Park Geun-hye behind bars. I'm sure that's what Yumin would want." Kim looked up to the heavens as if searching for his daughter Yumin, who died in the Sewol tragedy.



Some expressed disappointment at the Court's rejection of Park Geun-hye's missing seven hours during the Sewol Tragedy as a ground for impeachment. "I am disappointed," said Jeong Seong-uk, who lost his son in the tragedy. "The president has a duty to guard the lives and safety of the people, but her whereabouts in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy is still unclear. It's hard to accept that this is not a problem. Now that Park Geun-hye is a civilian, they must arrest her and uncover the truth behind the Sewol tragedy."

Baek Minjuhwa, the daughter of farmer activist Baek Nam-gi, who passed away last year after being hit by a water cannon at a mass demonstration in 2015, also welcomed the impeachment. She posted a photograph of her father on her Facebook page and wrote, "I'm just incredibly happy. My heart is beating fast."



Opposition Presidential Candidates Respond to the Verdict



Presidential candidate and Seongnam City mayor Lee Jae-myung held a press conference immediately following the impeachment verdict to say, "If she respects the constitutional order of the Republic of Korea, Park Geun-hye should immediately vacate the Blue House." He added, "Park should be immediately investigated for the crimes she has committed and receive appropriate punishment."

Lee also expressed disappointment at the Court's exclusion of the Sewol Tragedy from the impeachment verdict and said, "Deserting the scene of the death of hundreds of people, in my opinion, should be grounds for impeachment."

Presidential frontrunner Moon Jae-in of the opposition Minjoo Party embraced the impeachment decision at Paengmok Harbor in Jindo, South Jeolla Province, where the Sewol Tragedy took place. “The Sewol Tragedy was the beginning that sparked the mass candlelight demonstrations that led to the impeachment,” he said and stressed that the next administration must uncover the truth behind the Sewol tragedy. He added, “The entire nation watched the Sewol tragedy and asked, ‘What is a nation?’ and ‘For whom does the government exist?’ Today’s Constitutional Court ruling is a response to those questions.”

“The Sewol Special Investigative Commission was in the middle of uncovering the truth but was shut down through the interference of the government,” Moon added. “We need to re-establish the Sewol investigative commission to continue the incomplete investigation.” He pledged to make the search for the still-missing bodies of the tragedy a priority for himself and his party. Three years after the tragedy, nine bodies still remain missing.

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