

EVICTIIONS IN SEOUL 1988

Report from the ACHR Fact Finding Team in Seoul, Korea • September 6 - 10, 1988



Members of the Fact Finding Team:

- Judge Krishna Iyer, former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of India (Chairman)
- Han Van Putten, former Secretary General of IULA and Board Member of Habitat International Coalition, Netherlands
- John Battle, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom
- Denis Murphy, Journalist, Philippines
- Phra Mahanarong Jitasopano, Senior Buddhist Monk, Director of Buddhist Research Institute, Thailand
- Somsook Boonyabancha, Secretary of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Thailand
- Peter Swan, Media Specialist, Australia

This report from the fact finding team is the second stage of ACHR's South Korea Project, implemented as the first regional target project.

**Asian
Coalition
for Housing
Rights**

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.

Habitat International Coalition - Asia

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Fact Finding Team's Report

SEPTEMBER 6-10, 1988

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Members of Fact Finding Team and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights would like to express our deep gratitude to the help, friendly cooperation as well as warm hospitality the team had got from the following groups; the people and leaders of Chang Shin Dong, Seo Cho Dong, Toh Wha Dong, Yang Pyeong Dong, Don Am Dong, Peong Wha Chon and Sang Kyei Dong Communities, Cardinal Kim, Ministry of Construction, Seoul Minicipality, Korean Research Institute for Human Settlements, Toh Wha Dong Cooperative, President of the Lawyer Association, Young Architect Group, Sogang University, Groups of Bogumjahri and many hard working and dedicated friends.

As well as deep thanks to MISEROR, CAFOD and CEBEMO for financial assistance, CIIR and YUVA for all cooperation provided.

15 September 1988

PREFACE

At the invitation of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights -- the Asian Section of Habitat International Coalition -- a fact finding mission has visited Korea from 5 to 10 September, 1988 in order to report on the housing situation of the urban poor.

Habitat International Coalition is a federation of over 200 non-governmental and community-based organizations devoted to action for the recognition and implementation of the right of everyone to secure a place in which to live in peace and dignity. Members of the fact finding team are:

- Judge Krishna Iyer, Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of India (Chairman)
- John Battle, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom
- Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha, Secretary of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Thailand
- Denis Murphy, Journalist, Philippines
- Phra Mahanarong, Jitasopano, Senior Buddhist Monk, Director Buddhist Research Institute, Thailand
- Peter Swan, Media Specialist, Australia
- Han van Putten, Former Secretary General International Union of Local Authorities, Board Member Habitat International Coalition, Netherlands

The team has visited urban poor communities in Chang Shin Dong, Seo Cho Dong, Toh Wha Dong, Yang Pyeong Dong, Don Am Dong and Pyeong Wha Chon. It has had discussions with Cardinal Kim, and senior representatives of the Ministry of Construction, the city of Seoul, and the Korea National Housing Corporation. It has met with community leaders, lawyers, researchers and journalists.

Its findings can be summarized as follows:

- Commensurate with the unprecedented growth of the national wealth of the country there has been enormous construction activity in Korea during the last three decades.
- The housing policy of the government, which is claimed to be based solely on the free play of market forces, has made no provision for meeting the needs of the low-income communities, especially the renters among them.
- This government approach has adversely affected the people who live in "redevelopment" areas. Redevelopment areas are neighborhoods which are designated for "Improvement and beautification" : which means that the existing dwellings are demolished. In Seoul there are 210 such areas inhabited by at least 2,000,000 people. The homeowners in these areas are offered the right to buy an apartment on the redeveloped site. The actual situation is that on average only 10% of them can afford the price of the new dwellings and the other 90% are obliged to sell their rights. They are then in the same situation as the tenants from these areas who constitute more than 60% of their populations. No adequate provisions exist for rehousing the tenants. They are

usually unable to find in the neighborhood other rental accommodations for a price they are able to pay and have no place to go.

- Under these circumstances it is not surprising that they are unwilling to leave their homes voluntarily. The team heard reports of many cases where groups of thugs, sometimes under the eyes of police and officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. The team has heard personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts of people being severely beaten and several being arrested (and later being condemned to imprisonment for up to 6 months). The team knows the names of 13 persons who have lost their lives as a result of these interventions.
- As a result of these evictions many people are forced to pay a higher price for a smaller space; communities are broken; family life suffers; people lose access to jobs and their children cannot attend schools.

Over the period 1983 to 1988 it is estimated that, under the redevelopment schemes, 48,000 buildings -- the homes of 720,000 people -- have been destroyed.

- The government officials with whom the team met did not deny the facts as recorded above. They claimed that no forced evictions had taken place since May of this year in view of the Olympic games. They informed the team that the present government is reviewing its housing policies and practices. However, no change regarding the status and rights of tenants seems to be forthcoming. Neither were they prepared to undertake commitments to the cessation of large-scale evictions.

FACT FINDING REPORT

" Shelter is the Root of Happiness "

Buddhist Saying

The Fact Finding Team was in Seoul on the eve of the Olympics, when the tremendous achievements of South Korea over the last three decades were becoming apparent to the world. The games cap 35 years of sustained economic growth almost unparalleled in the modern world.

National wealth increased 12 times over since 1955. Seoul was physically rebuilt from the ruins of the 1950-1953 war and now rivals Tokyo in size and sophistication. In 1960 there was one bridge over the Han River linking the two halves of Seoul; now there are 18. Illiteracy has been reduced from 80% to 7% (Japanese colonizers-- 1909 to 1945-- had banned use of the Korean language and alphabet). Preparations for the Olympics were also exuberant. A subway system, for example, was constructed.

There is a dark side to this development. Workers, farmers and urban poor haven't shared to any great degree in the benefits. Past authoritarian regimes have made it extremely difficult to protest against this exclusion, and so it continued.

The urban poor have probably suffered more than any other group:

- * In the years 1985 - 1988 there was an unprecedented dislocation of people in Seoul's poorer areas. A research report of Seoul National University says 48,000 buildings housing 720,000 people were destroyed in those years. Ninety percent of the people had to seek space in other already crowded areas. The dislocation was carried out with at least one eye on the tourists and international scrutiny that would accompany the Olympics.
- * The poor were forcibly removed. The team heard of many cases where groups of thugs, sometimes under the eyes of police officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. The team heard personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts of people being severely beaten and arrested (some were sentenced to two years in prison for "special" violence. They usually served two to six months.) The team has the names of 13 persons who lost their lives as a result of these interventions from March 1986 to October 1987. As a result of the evictions many people had to

pay a higher price for a smaller space; communities were broken; family life suffered; people lost access to jobs and their children couldn't attend schools.

- * Renters who are usually 60% of the population in redevelopment areas are excluded by law from sharing in the benefits.
- * Close to 2 million poor people in Seoul live in fear that once the Olympics end, the evictions will begin anew.

The Olympics cap the past 35 years, but they also coincide with the coming to power of a new democratically elected government, a full blown opposition and relatively free media. Koreans hope the government will move towards greater respect for human rights, freedom and economic, but few we talked with seemed willing to bet that it would.

Government officials concerned with housing to whom the team talked said they were reviewing the past redevelopment policies because they were aware of the many problems found there. They generally disassociated themselves from those policies. They said there probably would be changes, but when asked, wouldn't commit themselves to make any important changes related to renters or evictions.

The Olympic games are, therefore, a watershed in Korean history. They can be seen as the symbol of the country's vast achievements--albeit these are marred by oppression and inequality. Whether the games will mark the beginning of a freer, more egalitarian society remains to be seen. No one is sure what direction the country will take. This ambiguity runs through the team's report.

The team spent most of its time visiting urban poor communities. Some of them are as small as 13 families, remnants of communities that once numbered in the hundreds. They have hung on in or near the areas where they once lived, stubbornly battling attempts over months and years to move them. Those familiar with the Bible might see in them the faithful remnants spoken of by Isaiah and Jesus. The people insist their resistance to evictions is part of their effort "to preserve their humanity."

We wish to tell the story of our visit and present our findings from their point of view. What time the team spent outside of visiting the areas was used trying to understand the roots of the country's housing policy which seemed to be one of the most irrational in Asia. Most of the 48,000 homes destroyed, for example, were solid, one-storey houses.

Seoul proper has 10 million people; greater Seoul close to 17 million. South Korea's total population is about 43 million, so the dominance of Seoul is apparent. About 300,000 poor rural people migrate to the city each year.

The principal government housing program from 1983 to the present has been the Joint Redevelopment Program. The government has designated 216 areas in Seoul, housing two to three million people, for this program. The areas are generally inhabited by lower income people usually three families to a house, one the house owner, the others the renters.

Theoretically, the homeowners are urged to form a cooperative that will select a construction company and decide on the type of new apartments desired. The coop will also manage administrative and financial matters.

The program has been described as joint redevelopment since responsibility is shared by the coop and the construction company. Tenants are not eligible for the coop or an apartment in the new building. They are given two months' living expenses, also called moving expenses, or a ticket entitling them to buy one-third of a new apartment. This is not a feasible option, so the tickets are quickly sold.

The cooperatives in practice are constituted largely of real estate people and are controlled by the construction companies.

CHANG SHIN DONG

This is a community of 27 families perched on the shelf of a tall hill not far from the heart of downtown Seoul. Before the redevelopment process began 1,800 to 2,000 families lived together on an adjoining hillside. That area has now been bulldozed and is ready for construction. We visited the families September 6.

A leader jailed twice for resisting gangsters who had come to destroy his home told us the community grew from three families who arrived in the area in 1950 to farm. In later years others came and lived in caves on the hillsides. By 1958 the hillsides were full of shacks. Nearly all were migrants from the rural areas, abandoning what they described as a hopeless situation there to seek a better life in the city. Many had been evicted from other urban areas.

The people said they were willing to pay up to \$70 a month per family for 5 years, or longer if necessary, to buy the land from the government. They would be delighted with 20 to 23 square meters.

While we talked children bounced up and down on a trampoline. In the air they could see the city spread out below. The people told us only 10% of home owners will enter the new apartments being built. They were told by a government official the very day we visited them that their community would be evicted when the Olympics were over.

The families, as all the families we visited, have TV's, refrigerators, heaters and good if simple food. The children go to school. Most men and women have jobs of one sort or another. However, they have no medical insurance, nor are there government hospitals to go to if they fall sick. Average family income is about \$300 a month.

SEO CHIO DONG

In the late afternoon of the same day we traveled directly south across the Han river to this community where the people live in reconverted green houses clustered around the monumental new 35 floor Supreme Court building. The area was once the cut-flower center of Seoul, till renting space to families became more profitable than flowers.

The residents were inaugurating their organization when we arrived. They placed their organization sign outside their new headquarters as custom required. There were flowers, speeches, soft September sun, chubby babies, politicians, women cooking a meal for all the neighborhood.

Most probably, we were told, the people would be evicted soon after the Olympics. It seems unlikely they will be allowed to remain in front of the new Supreme Court building-- the anomaly is too blatant.

This is not a resettlement area but a place swollen with poor people forced out of redevelopment areas and other places they can no longer afford. There may be as many as 8,000 families here. On the average they pay about \$4,500 for the right to occupy an eight square meter section of the greenhouse.

Mothers leave their young children at home during the day when they go to work, often locking the door in an attempt to keep them safe. We met a young girl typical of the many Catholic, Protestant and other social action people who help the urban poor. She lives in a greenhouse room. She told us: "I care for the children, take the sick to the hospital, teach the older women to read if they still don't know how to read, and I lead discussion groups." An old

woman who attended some of the discussions told us, "I used to think our poverty was our fault, but now I know that isn't so." "There's no place for us," another woman said.

A young boy of 8 or 9 seemed about to put a dragonfly on Judge Iyer's shoulder till his mother glared at him. Koreans listen with what seems like solemn gravity, but they laugh easily.

TOH WHA DONG

The next day we visited the office of the cooperative established for the Toh Wha Dong redevelopment area. Critics say the cooperatives are docile tools of the big construction companies, such as, Hyundai that build the apartments, and that most coop members are real estate dealers or their agents linked to the companies. When questioned about these charges, officials at the Ministry of Construction told us the makeup and activities of the coop have been a problem and need re-examination.

The coop head, a former homeowner, and an agent of Hyundai spoke with us. The agent seemed to be in charge, for several times he told the coop head how to respond. They admitted that only a small fraction of homeowners end up in new apartments.

The price at which the government sold the land to the coop was between \$150 and \$160 per square meter, the agent said. He admitted land just outside the redevelopment area would sell for many times that amount. The government, therefore, subsidizes the real estate dealers and construction companies though it often claims to leave housing matters to the free market forces.

The cheapest apartment available in Toh Wha Dong will cost \$38,000, far beyond what the low economic groups can afford.

The people's tiled-roofed homes which range up the side of the hill along narrow twisting roads reminded some of Italian mountain villages. We saw where some people had moved out and destroyed their own homes. When people move out, either because they've sold their rights to real estate agents or for other reasons, they're encouraged to knock down their walls and roofs so other families can't move in. The ruins were like scenes we've see in films of earthquake disasters. But even among the ruins life went on. In one corner an old woman stolidly peeled garlic. The houses are individually designed and follow traditional styles. People who work with the urban poor say that the last strongholds of traditional Korean culture exist in the urban poor areas.

A leader told us: "American capitalism has invaded Asia. Even here at the top of this high hill in an out of the way place you can see its effects. This redevelopment scheme is all about making money for the high government officials and the big construction companies."

He thought Korea should have its own slower rhythm of development and not try to follow the West. While he talked a baby slept on the floor.

Most men are construction workers who are employed only six months a year due to stoppages in winter, the rainy season and other delays. Their average monthly pay for the year, then, is about \$250 a month. People have no security. If they don't work, they don't eat. The government has a welfare program of food and coal for old people over 60 with no sources of income and for widows with minor children.

The people said they suffer in a variety of ways when they are forced out of an area. The new housing is usually more expensive and more crowded. They lose their contacts for getting jobs, for example, with labor contractors. The children's schooling is interrupted. Happy communities of people who supported one another are destroyed.

"Look at our children. See what this has done to them", a woman said. The children looked fine, but she repeated, "Look at them." People working with the poor say the children suffer from the tension in the air. The people in another area showed us pictures of their children sleeping in the open in winter during one eviction struggle. The small children were lined up under a blanket, their heads poking out.

The people say they had a meeting one night to discuss their problems and on coming out of the meeting police and gangsters beat them up. "We went to the coop office and sat in for five days until the police promised to catch the gangsters, and the head of the coop apologized. Another time riot police stopped us when we started on a peaceful march to explain our situation. Three of us were arrested. We threw coal ashes back and forth. A few days later 80 gangsters came. We fought back and 5 of us were hurt. The gangsters carried sledgehammers. One grandmother was hurt. Another woman had her arm broken."

Gangsters similar to mafia enforcers are available in Seoul for anyone willing to pay for their services. We were told the price is about \$112 a day per gangster. It used to be \$25, but the price went up when the gangsters realized the people would fight back and they themselves could be hurt.

The day after the five were hurt, people from 3 other development areas came to fight alongside the Toh Wha Dong people.

The people expect their houses to be demolished after the Olympics but they are determined to resist. "Why is our government doing this?" a man asked.

YANG PYEUNG DONG

This is a small community of 13 families who live about 40 meters from the main highway to Inchon. "They fought the hardest of all the communities", we were told. They live now in two rooms of crate-like houses on a seldom used street beside a factory. They lived on land taken by the government when it was extending the highway.

At one time the government sprayed them with cold water in winter to drive them out. Another time on Good Friday Cardinal Kim visited them and got a pledge from the local officials to give the people drinking water. The next day instead of drinking water the police and gangsters came in.

They ask two things of government: "Leave us alone. As long as we have work, we're all right. Give us a place to stay and we'll pay for it."

We asked the people why they resist. A grandmother who is 58 but looked older told us: "I thought it was pathetic, women fighting gangsters. I wanted to die. What is the meaning of life if you have to do this? But will we run away? No! It will be more expensive in the end to move. We were not treated as human beings, so we fought. Sure we are poor, but aren't we human also?"

She told us she herself fought because she was old and didn't want the young people hurt. Her son was once arrested, she told us. She visited him in prison where she saw him with his hands tied behind his back. When he asked the guard, "How can I eat with my hands tied behind my back?", the guard replied: "Eat it like a dog." She will never 'digest' her anger.

She didn't condemn others who moved away. "If they have a better place than this, we are happy for them. If it is the same, we are sorry for them. We have no regrets. If there is no better solution, we are ready to go through hell again," she said. She hauls bricks at a construction site as her job.

As night fell Phra Mahanarong said a prayer commending people to God and the Buddha.

DON AM DONG

We climbed what seemed like a mountain to the meeting hall of the Don Am Dong people who live not far from the first group we visited at Chang Shin Dong.

In 1984 some 1,630 home owners and 3,000 tenant families lived here. Now there are 150 homeowners and about 1,000 tenants.

They said the period before the Olympics was a cease fire in the war of the government against them. Here, too, many of the buildings had been destroyed by their owners. Some people were highly critical of the government. "It speaks of democratization but it carries out a kind of martial law," a man said. They expect to be evicted after the games.

The people told us 90% of the members of the coop are real estate agents or their proxies. Women agents, they said, flood the area once it's known that an area is scheduled for redevelopment, in order to buy up the people's rights to new housing.

"The coop and the construction company use every trick they can think of to divide the people," a man said. "If you can get ten people to move out with you, they'll give you a lot of money. They also spread rumors that leaders have taken bribes or misused the common fund. They promise to release people from prison if their families will move away."

They said they found religion was unrelated to their problems. A man said, "I'm so busy I don't have time to look at the moon or stars. I can't think of religion."

PYEONG WHA CHON

Here not far from the Olympic sites 14 families live alongside new high rise apartments. They have been evicted five times in the past. There used to be 600 tenants and 300 homeowners. The women go out each afternoon at 4:00 p.m. and stay out till 2 or 3:00 a.m. selling native wine and snacks. The government has limited the hours in which they can sell, and will ban all selling during the games.

MEETING WITH CARDINAL KIM AT MYEONG DONG CATHEDRAL

We met with the Cardinal September 9. Asked what he expected of the new government, he said he hoped the government would be more careful of the poor, that there were some small indications they

might be, but that it is necessary to wait and see.

He said he supported the efforts of Fr. John Daly and Paul Jeon Jeong Gu and others who work for the urban poor.

MEETING WITH MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND SEOUL MUNICIPALITY OFFICIALS

The officials received us civilly. They agreed that our statistics, similar to those presented in this report, were accurate. They also said they were reviewing the redevelopment program policies, but they wouldn't make firm commitments on the specific points we inquired about, for example, the status of tenants or large scale eviction. Several regulations they referred to spoke of renters as if they were less than full citizens.

They know there are problems in the way the program worked that must be corrected. The use of gangsters and the obvious manipulation of the coops are two examples. They said tenants may be given apartments but wouldn't say whether these would be at a far distance from Seoul, as the team had heard was the plan.

WHAT IS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM?

We believe the present program was fashioned into its present shape by agreement between the highest levels of the Korean government and the giant construction companies such as HyunDai, TaeRim, Woo Sung, and others.

Several factors coincided. The construction companies were underutilized as construction contracts fell off in the Mideast due to falling oil prices. Government officials needed money for the Olympics and other purposes. The ministries executed the plan: land was sold at very low prices, the manipulation of coops was allowed, gangsters did violence to civilians unmolested, since it was clear this was all in behalf of a project blessed at the top. No matter that it was ruinous to the city's housing stock and more importantly to the city's people.

CONCLUSIONS

The Fact Finding Team urged the Korean authorities:

- * to accept the right to housing for everyone, as proclaimed in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and confirmed in Article 11 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as a guiding principle of its human settlement policies;

- * to introduce a policy which will enable those who cannot (yet) participate in the market to buy or rent adequate shelter;
- * to stop the demolition of existing low-income houses in view of the scarcity of affordable shelter;
- * to put an absolute stop on eviction unless, in consultation with the people concerned, an adequate shelter alternative has been found for both tenants and homeowners.

The members of the team concluded that it would:

- * publish a fully documented report and a video tape of the visit;
- * individually and collectively promote the attention of governments, international organizations and the public in general to the plight of the urban poor in Korea;
- * closely follow the developments with regard to the housing situation of the urban poor in Korea.

What will happen in the future?

Perhaps Cardinal Kim's assessment is the best. There are small signs things may be better, but we must wait and see.

When we visited the Sang Kyel Dong community in Ducheon City, a young married man told us why he continues to resist government efforts to evict him. His words seem an apt way to end this report:

"At times we were tempted to give up. We were tired of being beaten. But we realized that if we gave up and went away, we'd be alone again and, being alone, we'd be helpless. We determined to carry on. Really what we're doing is forming a community. We're peaceful people. If the government will let us build our houses and live together in a simple way, we'll be happy and peaceful. Till then we'll resist."

Seoul, 11 September, 1988

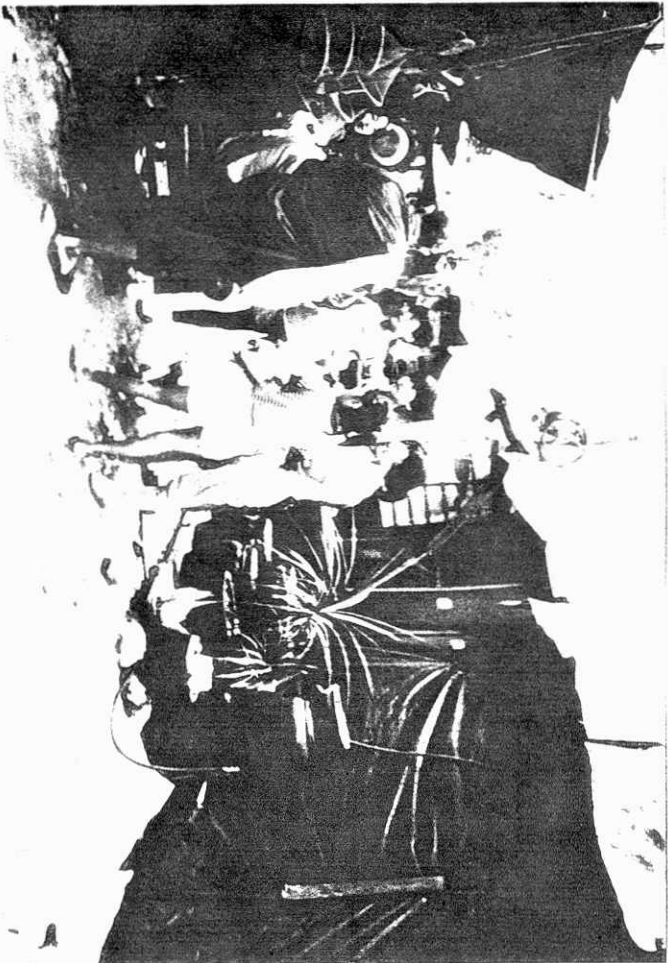
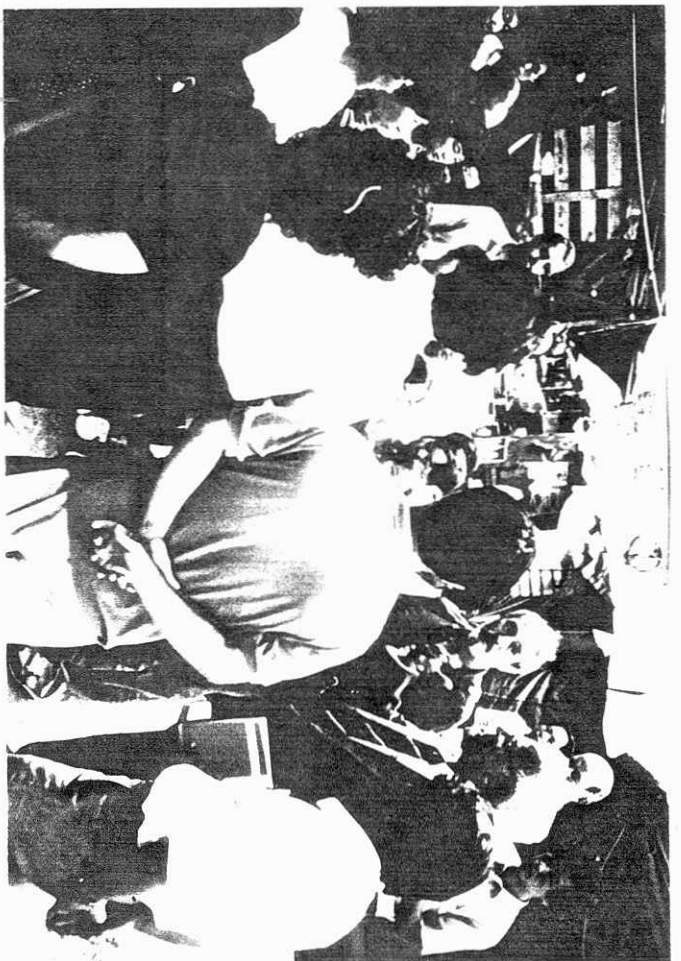
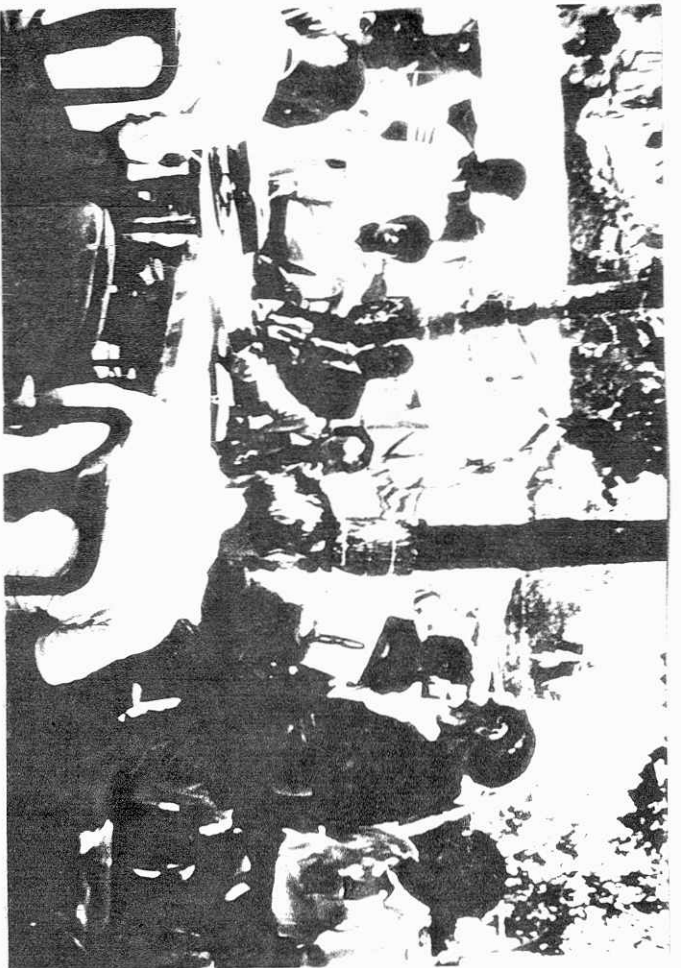
Fact Finding Schedule 6-11 September 1988

DATE	MORNING		AFTERNOON	EVENING
6	- Orientation - Fixing FFT schedule		Visited Chang Shin Dong Community	Visited Seocho Dong and attended community meeting
7	Feed back and rearranged the schedule		Visited Toh Wha Dong Redevelopment area and Cooperative Also visited Government's Korean Research Institute for HS	Visited Yang Pyeong Dong evicted community Group discussion
8	Visited Don Am Dong Redevelopment Area		Visited Pyeong Wha Chon (The Peace Village)	Meeting with different groups and community leaders
9	Meeting with Lawyer Association	Meeting with Cardinal Kim	Meeting with Responsible Government Organizations: Ministry of Construction, Seoul Municipality, etc ,	Group wrap up discussion
10	Press Release and interview		FFT report drafting	Group discussion about FFT report and finalized
11	Free		Visited Sang Kyei Dong Community	

SOME PICTURES

Illustrating the Fact Finding Team Mission
in Seoul 6-10 September 1988.

Visited the communities: Chang Shin Dong,
Seo Cho Dong, Toh Wha Dong, Yang Peong Dong,
Ton Am Dong, Peace Village and meetings.



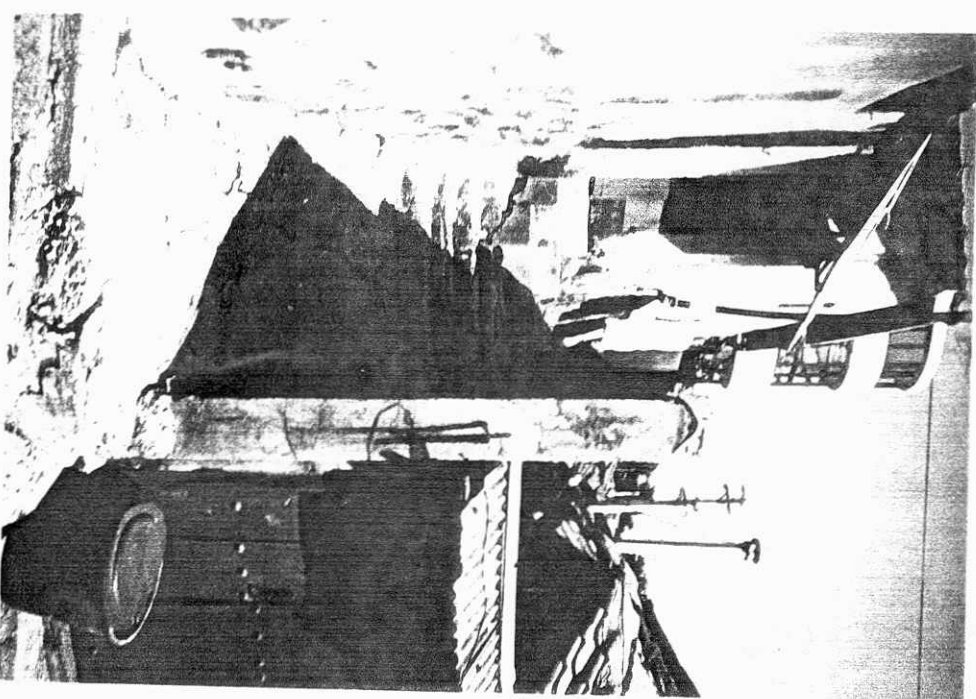
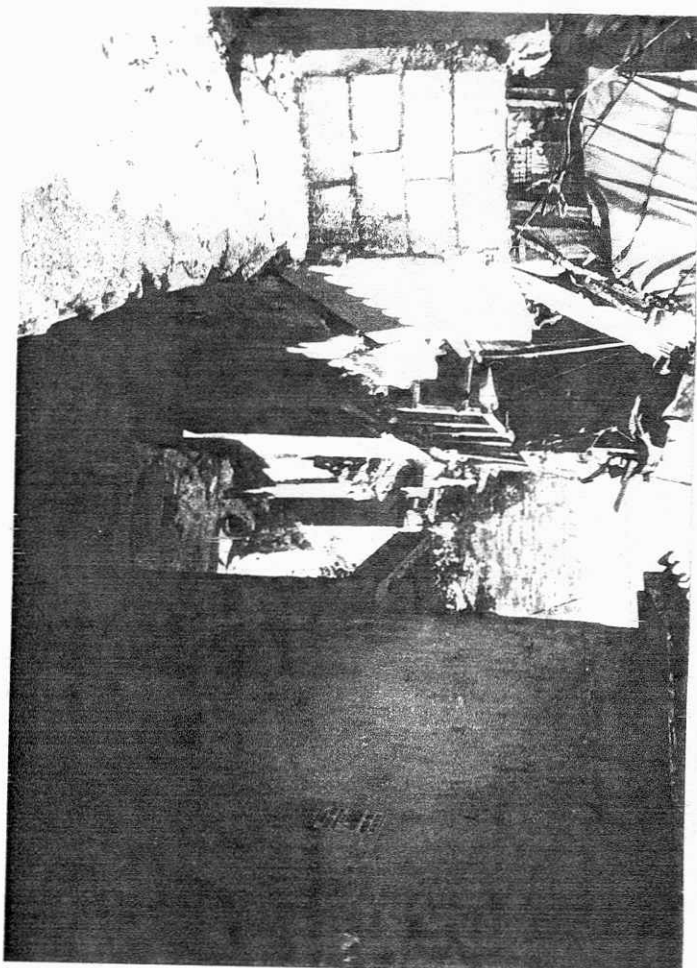
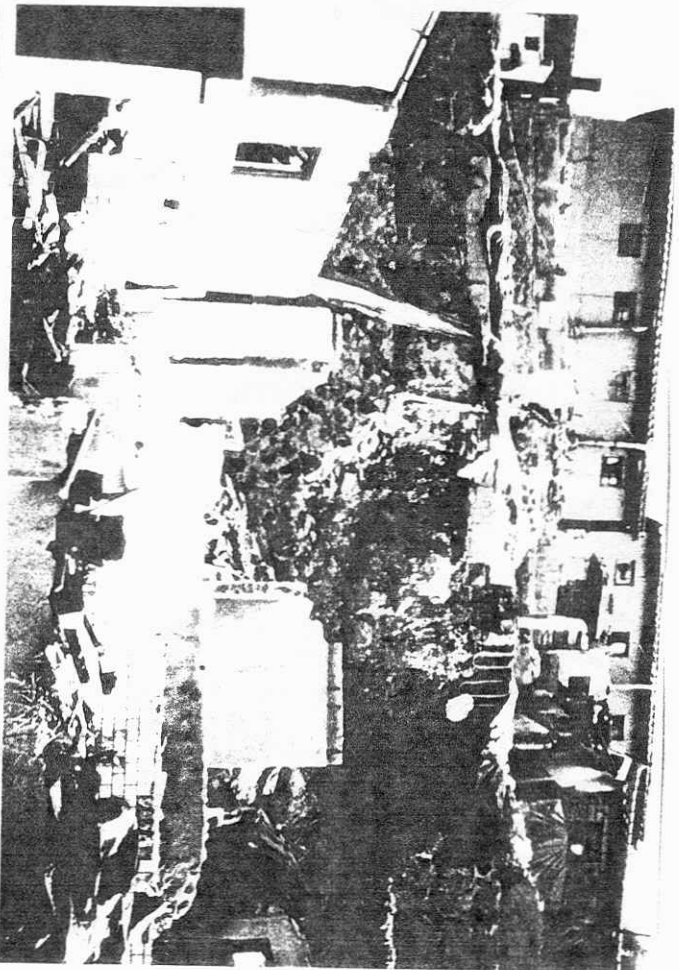
CHANG SHIN DONG

Number of families in former community before eviction by redevelopment was between 1,800-2,000

The visited community has been set up on the shelf of a high hill near to former evicted areas. Number of family was 27.

TOH WHA DONG

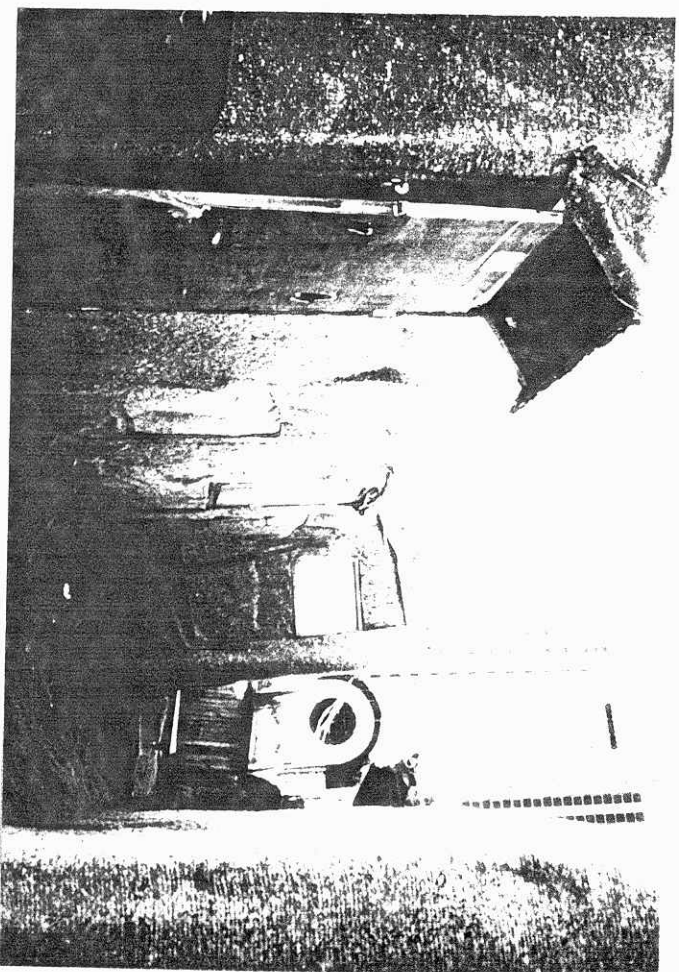
Number of families	
Homeowners	1,880
Tenants	2,400





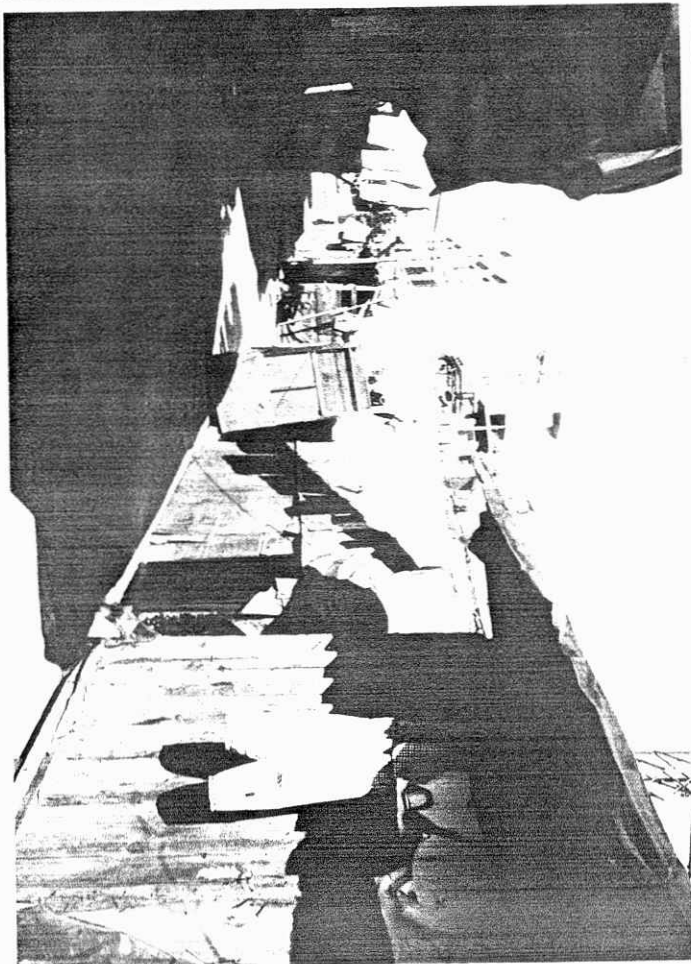
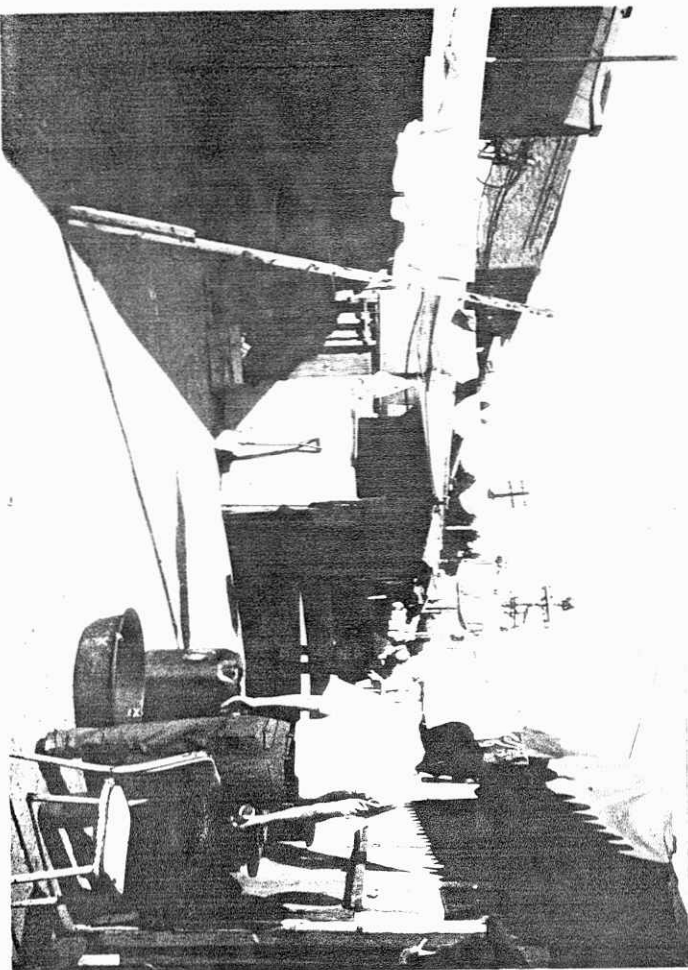
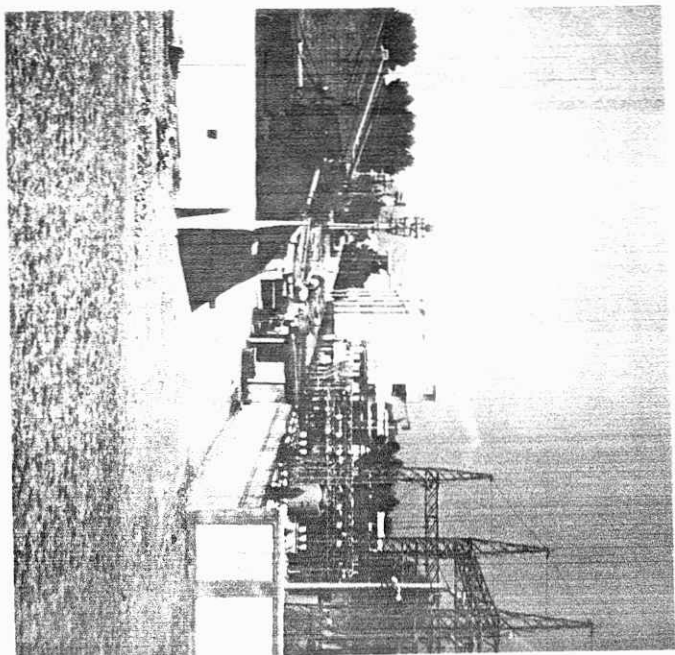
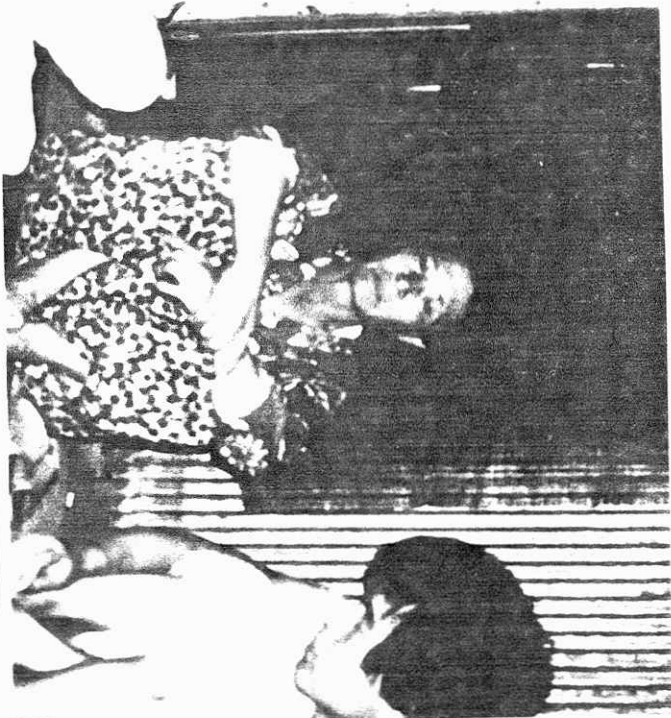
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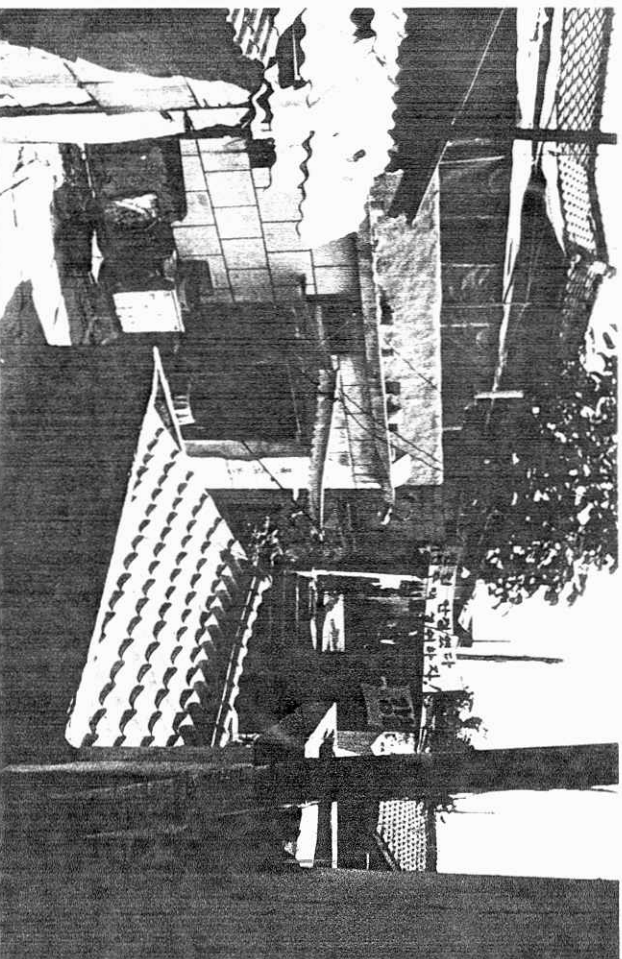
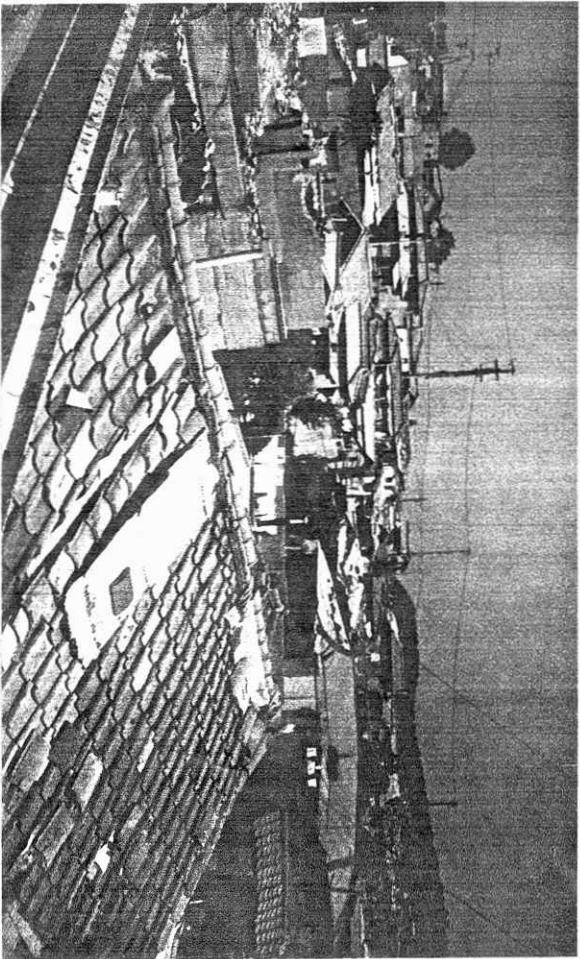
About 7,000-8,000 families
The area of the evicted
from other communities



YEONG PEONG DONG

Number of families:
 Homeowners 70
 Tenants 340
 Eviction from nearby public
 work redevelopment of
 Seoul-Inchon expressway





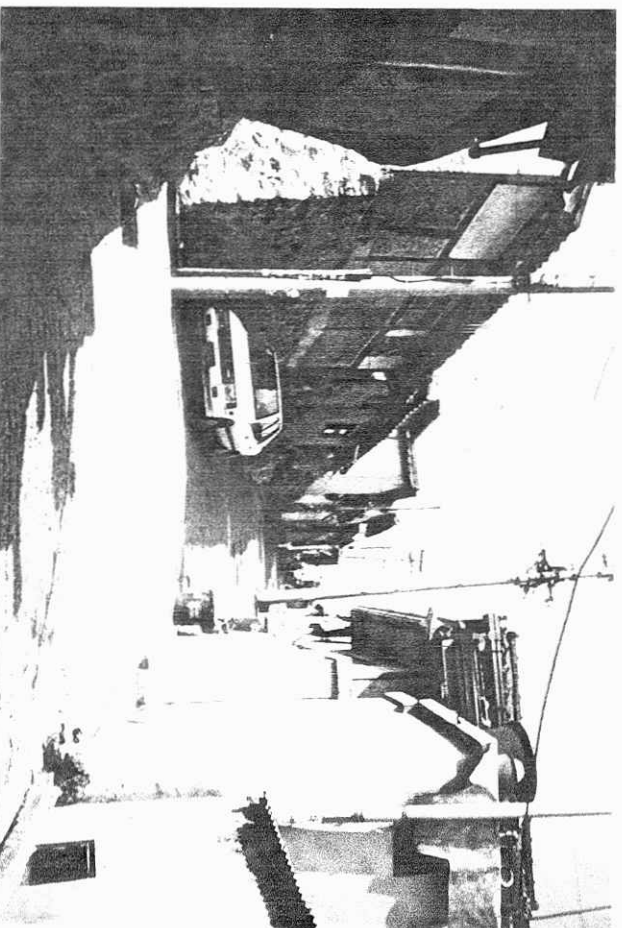
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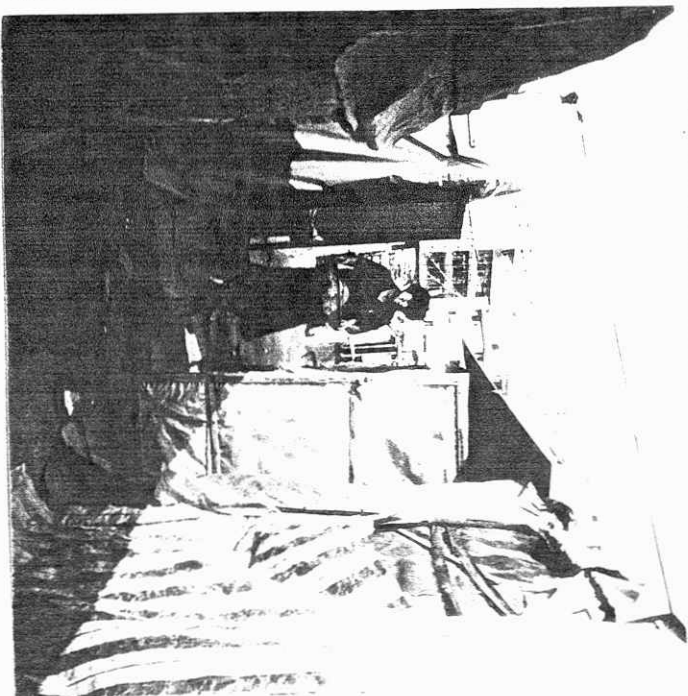
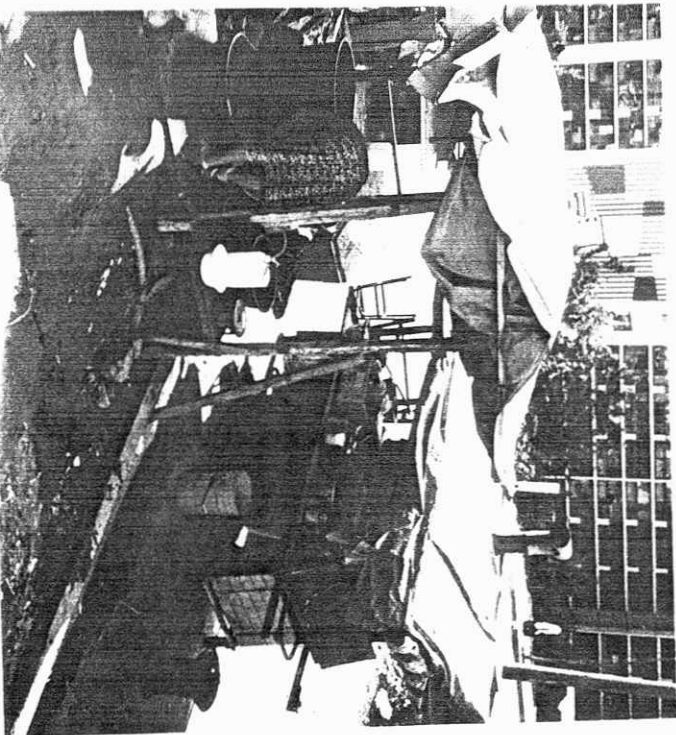
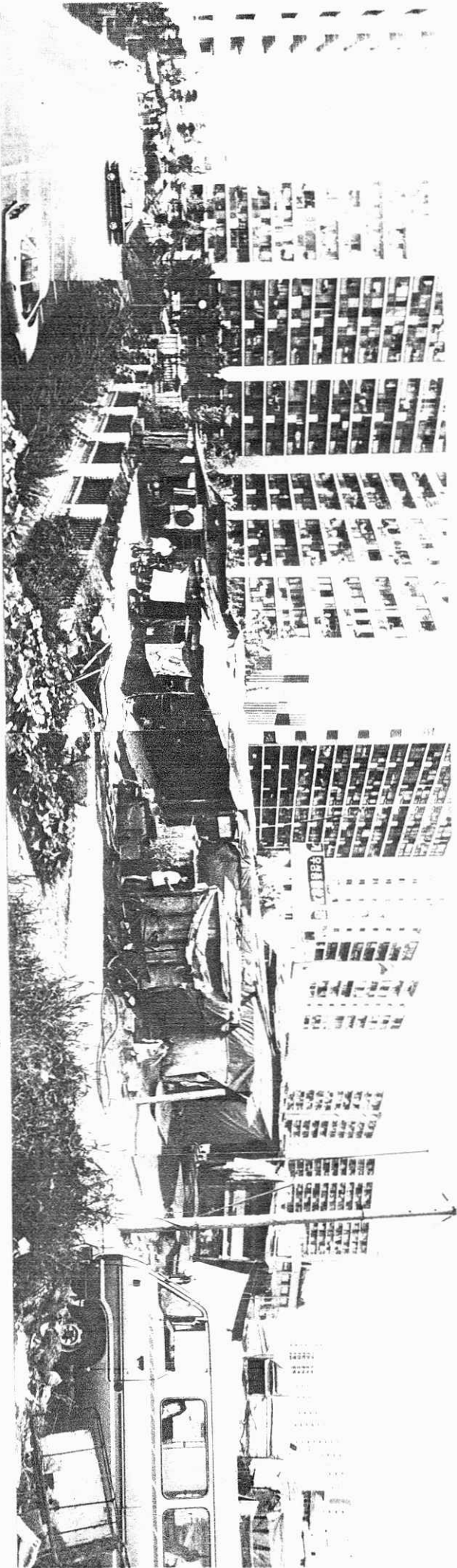
Number of families:

Homeowners 1,628

Tenants 3,000

An old stable village since 1960.
Redevelopment project and eviction
has started since 1984.





PEONG WHA CHON

(Peace Village)

Number of families:

Home owners 960

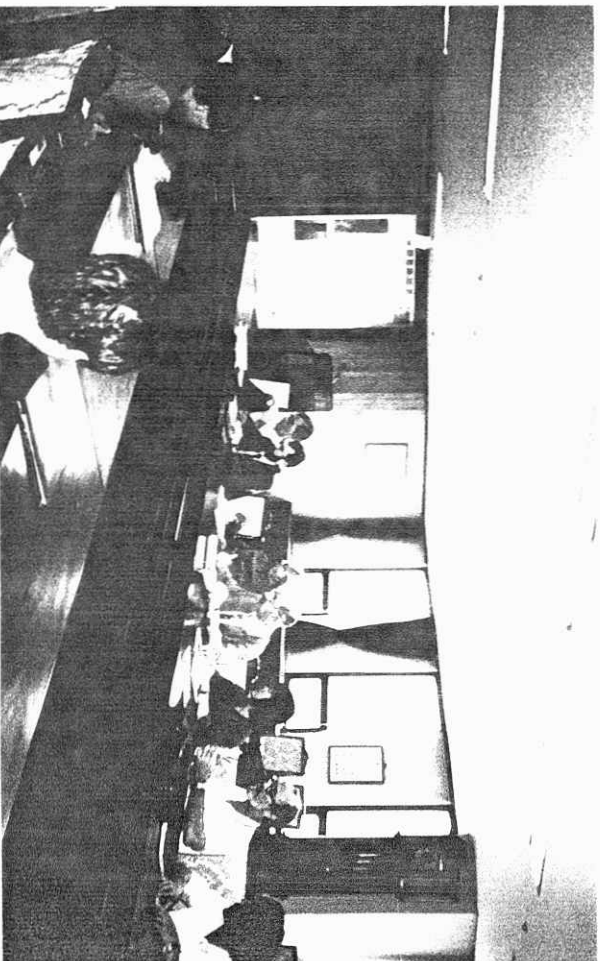
Tenants 360

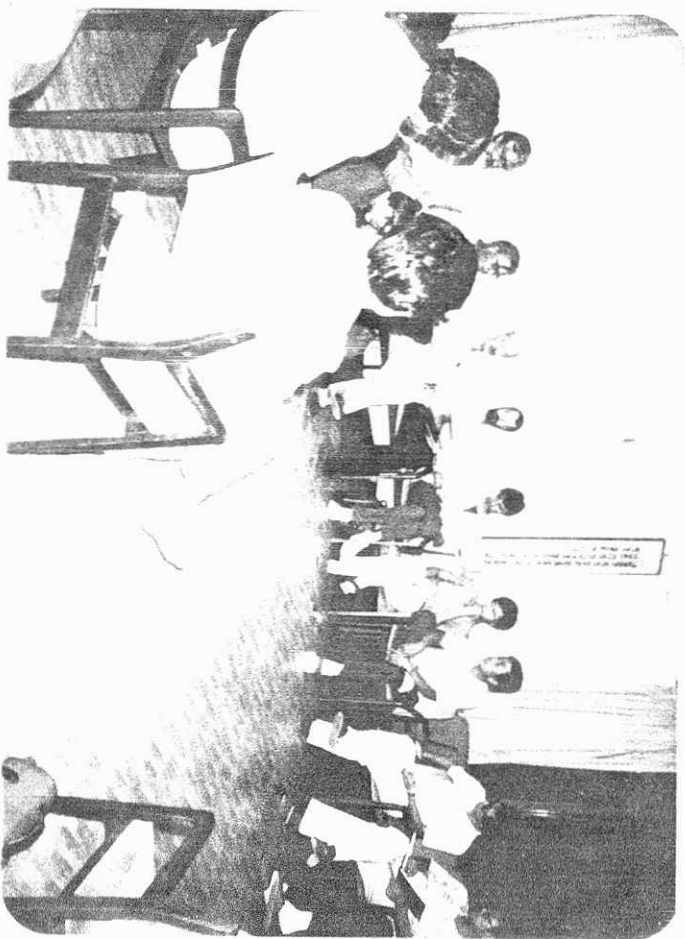
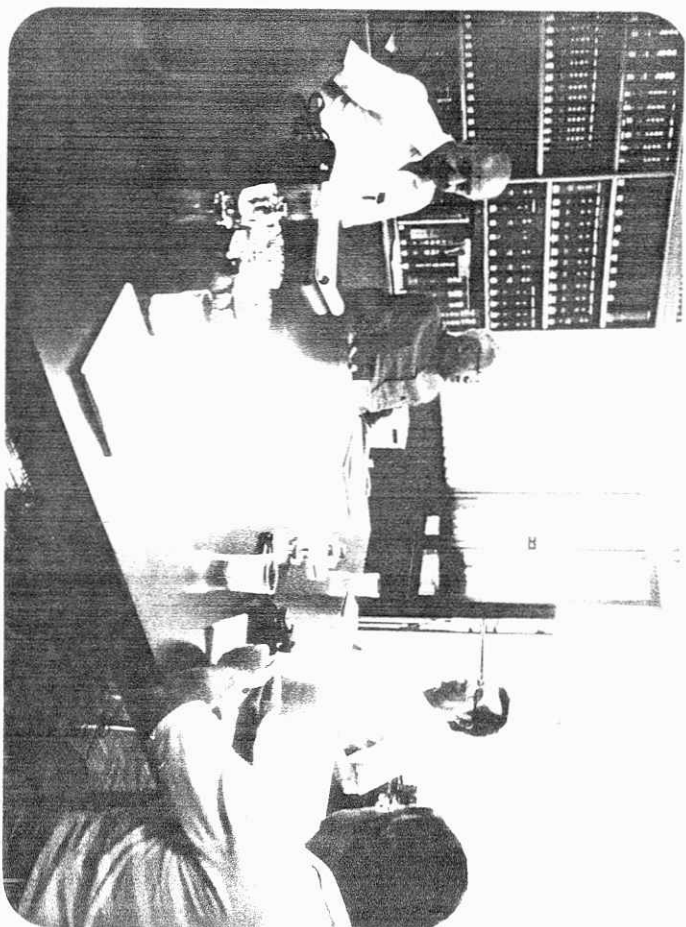
have been evicted 5 times



1
22

1. Meeting with President of
Korean's Lawyer Association
2. Meeting with responsible
Government organizations





1. Meeting with Cardinal Kim
2. Meeting with different groups
3. Meeting with community of Pyeong Wha Dong