



WON SOON PARK, 1999 KOREA

Mayor, City of Seoul

In 1999, Won-Soon Park arrived in the United States as an Eisenhower Fellow to gain experience and perspectives on the operation and management of the not-for-profit organizations.

As a human rights lawyer and spokesperson for democratization and a civil society, Park was serving as the Secretary General of the civic group, *People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy* (PSPD). He had been engaged in the struggle for democracy and civil society since 1975 when he was jailed as a participant in a student movement protesting dictatorship. Park embarked on his fellowship to better understand fundraising, public interest litigation, volunteerism, and the notion of free press and open society.



Throughout his travels, he found that “public interest law is the engine of social reform”, and was inspired by the organizations that he met which were having a large impact with minimal resources. He also found himself intrigued by the dedication of society to the traditions of civilization and democracy as evidenced in the Freedom of Information Act.

Upon his return to Korea, Park said his dedication to public interest law had doubled. His first project after the fellowship was publishing a book which introduced what he learned and experienced through his travels in the U.S. In this book, *NGO, People's Power Changes the World*, he discusses activist groups in the U.S. and citizen's participation in civic movements. To date, Park has published over 30 books about social movements, focusing on many of the categories from his fellowship; particularly the philanthropic culture of giving donations and fundraising.

Park has also established public corporations, including Beautiful Stores, which began as a market for second-hand items but has since grown into The Beautiful Foundation, a global NGO serving the public interest by supporting activities and by contributing to environmentally-friendly changes. Another accomplishment in this area is Park's establishment of *Hope Institute*, a people-based research institute that generates alternative policies based on grassroots research. It supports and fosters small and social enterprises and provides educational programs for seniors and public leaders.

In 2011, Park reached a new milestone when he was elected mayor of Seoul. His hope is that Seoul will serve as a host for an EF conference and that he will be able to put Seoul on the map as a world class-cosmopolitan city. Constantly carrying the lessons of his Eisenhower Fellowship, he states that because of his experiences, he will “persistently try to make a bridge between what I learned and where we Koreans are.”

Leaders bettering the world around them.