

KAGRO reaches four-point agreement with Bloods, Crips

By Sophia Kyung Kim
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Despite opposition from some community opinion makers, the leaders of the Korean American Grocers Association agreed to help find four jobs in Koreatown for former gang members of the Bloods and Crips.

The four-hour meeting held at the Sheraton Hotel in Lakewood on May 30 produced three other points of agreement:

- KAGRO will participate in the June 19 unity celebration to be tentatively held in Koreatown. A second party is scheduled to be held in South Los Angeles;
- The merchants will explore the possibility of a joint black-Korean venture to run a market in Compton and;
- Gang members will be permitted to use the preview of KA movie producer Duk Han's film about

interracial relations, "For the Color of Love," to raise money.

"Everyone has their own perspective. I don't care about (community criticism)," said Yang Il Kim, National KAGRO president. "Most of the complaints came from community leaders who have never been involved in black-Korean tension. They don't do business in the black community. We are the soldiers."

The second meeting at the Korean Consul General's office took place one day after KA leaders, representing numerous community groups, met and condemned KAGRO's meeting with gang members and said they would not get involved.

Community leaders criticized the first meeting which took place on May 25 at Wilshire Plaza Hotel. Kim and David Kim, president of Southern California KAGRO, met with the Rev. James Stern, who counsels gangs, and

four leaders of the Bloods and Crips.

In addition to jobs, the gang leaders proposed that a Korean-run bank open in their neighborhood and offered to patrol Koreatown and South Central Los Angeles in the "Guardian Angel" style.

The KAGRO leaders offered to consider the gangs' proposal, present it to their community and bring back a response.

In terms of the proposal for jobs, the Rev. James H. Stern said he has four resumes from young black men who want jobs and will submit them to Kim. He checked their references and one of the applicants holds a bachelor's degree in business from a university in Oklahoma, Stern said.

Edward Hawthorne, a black businessman, has given him the key to a free 6,000-square building at 815 Long Beach Blvd. to set up a market, claimed

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Stern.

During his second meeting with the black minister, Yang Il Kim made it clear that he was representing KAGRO, not the whole KA community.

He also informed Stern that he didn't have the authority to persuade businessmen to open up a Korean-run bank in the black community, start up a vocational school or help get loans for new black businesses.

Yang Il Kim said he doesn't regret ever meeting with the gang delegation. "My only regret is that we held a press conference with the major mainstream press," he said.

He was referring to the widespread coverage the first meeting received in the *Los Angeles Times*, which led readers to believe

that some pact had been made between KAGRO and the gang leaders.

During the Korean community meeting, KA leaders expressed anger over KAGRO's dialogue with the gangs. "But after I made a speech to them, explained what my intention was, they fully understood," Yang Il Kim told the *Korea Times English Section*.

But that wasn't enough to change the community leaders' decision to disassociate from KAGRO.

"Meeting with gang members doesn't give good image to the Korean community," said Kee Whan Ha, the incoming president of the Korean Chamber of Commerce. "We are not sure the gang members who attended are representative of all the gangs. Second, we should deal with police, community organizations instead."

Bong Hwan Kim, executive director of the Korean Youth Center, said KAGRO leaders must realize that what they do impacts the rest of the KA community.

"I am not opposed to working with gang members, but the responsibility has to be put on-city officials, police. They have the

responsibility to make any significant impact on problems KAGRO should not bear the responsibility of (establishing) youth programs only."

T.S. Chung, legal counsel for National KAGRO, said he was "somewhat surprised" by the Korean community's negative response.

"The unfortunate aspect of it is that feelings were based on misunderstandings and misinformation and wrong assumptions about the motives of the Korean Americans who met with the gang members," he said.

Chung, who attended the two meetings with the gangs, said KAGRO leaders would have never met with the Bloods and Crips if they were not convinced that these youths wanted to positively turn their life around.

Meanwhile, Yang Il Kim remains undaunted by the KA community's criticism.

"I have very strong strength and will. Somebody must get involved," he said. He added that many KA merchants who operate businesses in black neighborhoods support his actions.