

Union vows to defy laws, join local elections

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April 21, 2006 ? The Korea Government Employees Union said yesterday that it will participate in the May 31 local elections, defying four national laws banning public employees and officials from participating in political activities.

Although the National Assembly passed a law earlier this year allowing government workers to form a union, the government union refused to register. It argued the law did not provide any right to collective action. Thus, the union is still considered illegal.

The union announced its plans at a press conference yesterday at the Seoul office of the Democratic Labor Party.

The government union, which represents 140,000 people, was organized in 2002 when public employees were prohibited from forming a union.

The union also announced yesterday that it has joined the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, making it the largest of Korea's two umbrella unions, with more than 800,000 members.

For its first action, the new umbrella union plans to file a complaint against the government with the International Labor Organization, the United Nations specialized agency that promotes human and labor rights.

"For the local elections in May, the union will actively support 670 candidates of the Democratic Labor Party whose policies are the closest to the union's principles and platform," said Kwon Seung-bok, president of the public employees' union.

Six union members will also run as candidates of the Democratic Labor Party. Some union officials, including Mr. Kwon, have been dismissed from their government jobs.

In the April 15, 2004 legislative elections, the union also defied government regulations by supporting the Democratic Labor Party.

Kim Young-gil, the union head at the time, was convicted and given an eight-month suspended sentence.

The public officials' union law, which was enacted Jan. 28, prohibits the civil servants' union and its members from political activities.

Three separate laws targeting government officials, local government officials and the election of government officials also require civil servants to maintain political neutrality.

People who violate those laws can be sentenced to a prison term of not more than three years or a fine not to exceed 6 million won (\$6,325).

P.S.

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