

Joint Statement of the Labor Affairs Council United States - Korea Free Trade Agreement

Virtually

April 26, 2022 (United States)

April 27, 2022 (Republic of Korea)

The Labor Affairs Council (the Council) of the United States – Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) convened on April 26, 2022 starting at 9:00am Korea Standard Time (KST) (April 25, 2022, at 8:00pm, Eastern Standard Time (EST)). Pursuant to Article 19.5 of KORUS, the Council may meet to oversee the implementation of Chapter 19 (Labor), including the activities of the Labor Cooperation Mechanism established under Article 19.6. The Council is composed of senior governmental representatives from the labor ministries and other appropriate agencies or ministries of each Party.

The Council meeting was held via videoconference and hosted by the Republic of Korea. Mr. Kil Joon Noh, Director General of the International Cooperation Bureau, Ministry of Employment and Labor; and Mr. Haeyoung Chung, Director of the International Cooperation Division, Ministry of Employment and Labor, led the Korean delegation. Ms. Thea Lee, Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor; and Mr. Joshua Kagan, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Labor, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, led the U.S. delegation.

During the meeting, Parties celebrated the 10th anniversary of KORUS, underscored the importance of the commitments in the Labor Chapter, and expressed a shared desire for strengthened cooperation on labor standards and worker protection. The Council discussed domestic mechanisms, institutions, and procedures that each Party is employing to advance the fulfillment of the Labor Chapter's provisions. In addition, the Council held in-depth discussions on a wide range of topics, including: (1) innovations and challenges in protecting worker rights domestically and internationally; (2) advancements in U.S. legal framework related to forced labor in trade; (3) Korea's ratification of ILO Fundamental Conventions; and (4) areas for ongoing and future cooperation and technical capacity building on labor standards. The Parties expressed their strong desire to continue collaborating on matters addressed in the Labor Chapter.

A public session of the Council was held on April 27 at 9:00am KST (April 26 at 8:00pm EST). The Council provided an opportunity for workers, employers, civil society organizations, and the general public to discuss matters related to the implementation of the Labor Chapter of the KORUS. The Parties noted the value that the public session provided in enhancing transparency and facilitating the exchange of information with the public regarding the implementation of the Labor Chapter's obligations.