

Geological Society of Japan

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September 16, 2022

Prof. Cheong Dae-kyo
Chair, Organizing Committee
The 37th International Geological Congress

Prof. Kim Young-seog
Secretary-General,
The 37th International Geological Congress

Dear Professor Cheong and Professor Kim,

In 2015, after the Korean geological community had made the decision to put in a proposal to host the International Geological Congress to be held in 2024 (IGC2024), the Geological Society of Korea (GSK) contacted the Geological Society of Japan (JGS) requesting our cooperation with preparing the proposal documents, including plans for IGC field excursions to be held in Japan. The JGS sent a letter of support to the GSK signed by the then President on April 1, 2016, expressing our Society's willingness to assist with the proposal building on the productive collaboration we have enjoyed with the Korean geological and geoscience communities over many years. Our offer of support included cooperation with field excursions, and the JGS sent proposals for ten candidate field excursions in Japan that could be held as IGC2024 field trips. In addition, a personal message of support from the then President of the JGS was sent to the GSK, dated April 23.

It was announced in 2016 that Korea had been successful in its bid to host IGC2024, and we assume that the preparations for hosting the IGC2024 led by the Korean local organization committee (KLOC) has started soon after that. However, the KLOC did not provide the JGS with any IGC-related information or reach out to us to discuss plans for the IGC field excursions. The first information we had about plans for IGC2024 after 2016 was when we noticed that the KLOC had uploaded information about planned field excursions on its website. This seems to have been done in mid 2021. The JGS were concerned to notice that in this information the KLOC includes 1) an excursion planning to visit Takeshima, which is the subject of a territorial dispute between Japan and Korea with both claiming sovereignty, and 2) the geographical name 'Japan Sea' originally included in the descriptions for field excursions provided by the JGS had been changed to 'East Sea (Japan Sea)' without any consultation or obtaining our permission. The 'Japan Sea' is the only name for this body of water that is recognized in the International Hydrographic Organization's (IHO) guidelines, which are the global standard. In addition, we noticed the term 'East Sea' was also used in several other parts of the website. The appropriate way to refer to this body of water is a point of dispute between the governments of Japan and Korea—this dispute is well known in both countries. When the JGS became aware of the contents of the IGC2024 website, we became concerned that the Congress might be used to advance Korea's political agenda to the detriment of scientific collaboration. We also recognized that unless changes were made it would be difficult for the JGS and other members of the Japanese geological community to cooperate with and participate in IGC2024.

To attempt to resolve this unfortunate situation and to allow IGC2024 to be held under a cooperative framework beneficial to both Korea and Japan, the JGS contacted the KLOC at the end of August 2021 to propose talks between the two sides. At the same time, the JGS requested that the KLOC

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remove the information on its website concerning the proposed field excursions in Japan until both parties reached an agreement. The first meeting between the JGS and the KLOC was held online on September 27 in 2021. Although there was a need to continue the discussions, the KLOC was slow to respond to requests to arrange subsequent meetings, and half a year passed without any further concrete progress. During this time the JGS discussed their concerns regarding the planning of IGC 2024 with the Science Council of Japan. Due of the lack of progress in direct talks with the KLOC and as a result of the consultations within Japan, the JGS decided to reach out to other concerned parties. When the 77th IUGS Executive Committee Meeting was held on March 16–18 in 2022, the Japanese members (who are the members of the Earth Science Division of the Science Council of Japan) participated remotely. One of the Japanese members explained to the participating IUGS committee members (more than 20 people) the problems with the current proposed organization for IGC2024: the inclusion of a field excursion to Takeshima and the inappropriate notation for the Japan Sea. The Japanese side requested that the management and organization of the IGC 2024 are arranged so they follow internationally agreed standards and are beyond international political disagreements.

After the announcement at the IUGS Executive Committee meeting new discussions were arranged between the JGS and the KLOC. A total of four meetings were held online on the following dates: March 22, May 12, June 21, and July 29, 2022. In the meeting held on June 21, 2022, the KLOC announced they intended to "withdraw plans for the Takeshima excursion" with the formal decision to be made at the next KLOC meeting. At the subsequent online meeting between the two sides held on July 29, it was confirmed that plans for a Takeshima field excursion had been withdrawn. However, the KLOC could not agree to using Japan Sea (or Sea of Japan) in their official IGC documents. In response the JGS proposed a solution to the problem whereby neither of the two names preferred by Japan and Korea were used; instead an International Maritime Code would be used, which could be interpreted separately by both sides. This idea follows an approach that has been internationally adopted in recent years. The KLOC said they would consider this proposal and hoped to give a response in the following week.

Despite several reminders and requests for a reply there was no contact from the KLOC until September 9, 2022, when a letter arrived by email that was addressed to the President of the JGS (albeit a President from a decade ago). This letter stated that the KLOC's final decision was that the Takeshima excursion had not been canceled but was being considered for cancellation and that the official designation of the Japan Sea in IGC2024 would be East Sea/Japan Sea. We also noted that despite several requests to remove the information about the field excursion to Takeshima from its website, the KLOC has still not made any such changes.

The JGS and other related parties in Japan were very surprised by the response from the KLOC. The JGS had conducted a series of negotiations in good faith over a period of more than a year, and these had led to progress on the field excursion issue and a compromise proposal had been made on the marine nomenclature issue. However, in its final decision the KLOC had shown no flexibility and no recognition of the concerns raised by Japan. In consideration of the contents of this final response from the KLOC, the JGS unfortunately sees no alternative but to withdraw the letter of support sent on April 1, 2016, and the message of support sent on April 23, 2016, by the then President of the Society.

The JGS considers IGC2024 to be a great opportunity to showcase the geology of east Asia and

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demonstrate the benefits of international collaboration. It is with great regret that under the present circumstances the JGS will not be able to support or participate in the IGC 2024. We sincerely hope that the Korean geological community can still find a way to pursue a more internationally-minded approach that will form the basis for productive international cooperation and help make IGC2024 the success we all hope for.

Sincerely yours,

岡田 誠

Makoto Okada

President, the Geological Society of Japan

Professor, Graduate School of Science and Technology, Ibaraki University, Japan