

## [JPIC News] Standing in solidarity with suffering creatures(1)



‘Sura’ means embroidered on silk. It is also the name of a tidal flat on the Korean Peninsula's west coast. ‘Sura’ plays a great role in the sea's purification and high biodiversity level. This is the LAST remaining tidal flat in the Saemangeum reclamation project, which has been underway for 32 years. This reclamation project was supposed to provide new lands for more industrial development by building an extensive seawall across its coastal area. However, this vast project eventually caused much harm to residents because they lost their primary source of income, fishing. Now, this village has become quite barren. Millions of animals and plants have lost their natural habitats, and migratory birds have been deprived of their stopover. Moreover, the Korean government has recently planned to build a new airport by reclaiming the Sura Tidal Flat.

Although many creatures died due to the reclamation project, various animals and plants are still alive in Sura. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has declared that Korea's Tidal Flats are one of the world's most essential and meaningful habitats for global biodiversity conservation. They are precious as a stopping point for endangered migratory birds, so their ‘outstanding universal value’ is recognized. Therefore, we can't give up keeping Sura safe. Many residents with the Citizen Ecological Group, which has surveyed the ecosystem in Sura for over 20 years, and four major religions in Korea- Catholic, Protestant, Buddhism, and Won Buddhism- have acted against the government's decision.

On November 6, 2023, sisters from Regina Pacis Province attended Mass, where they prayed to restore the tidal flat at the Saemangeum area. The mass was celebrated by the Ecological Environment Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Korea, and about 300 hundred people, including religious, participated. The people who gathered for Mass lifted their prayers for protecting the creatures that have been endangered worldwide, especially in Saemangeum, and for the withdrawal of the government's decision to make an airport at Sura. After the mass, attendants headed to the site the government had designated for the new airport. We could see many birds flying together and catching prey at the flat.

All attendants prayed that the tidal flats would be restored to a place of vitality and that human beings would stop destroying the common home God had created.