

Testimony of Ms. Jinhye Jo Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hello my name is Jinhye Jo and I am a North Korean defector.

I want to first extend my greeting of deep appreciation to God, the United States Government, and the American people for allowing me the freedom to speak before you at this place, and also for the fact that I am living in America, a place which is like heaven to me. In North Korea one could not dream of going to Pyongyang freely unless you were a part of the inner circle of Kim Jong Il. However I am now living in the Washington, D.C. area, the capital of the United States, and I am here today to make an earnest request.

With a desire to fill our hungry stomachs, we escaped to China to seek the freedom that my mother spoke of. However, what awaited us were the Chinese police and security officials who were obsessed with searching for and arresting North Korean defectors, and human traffickers who did not see a mother of two children but rather a source of money-making. My sister and I were young and naïve and were just so glad to be able to eat white rice, but we always lived in fear that one morning when we woke up our mother would be taken somewhere to be sold, or that she would abandon us and leave us. By chance I happened to find God and became a Christian at a small countryside church, and through the grace of God and his protection, even though I was forcibly repatriated four times to North Korea, I did not die from beatings, I did not die from starvation, and I was able to survive and live.

The North Korean 'bowibu', or National Security Agency officials, strip search the defector women who are sent back, searching every article of clothing to look for hidden money. If nothing of value is found among the clothing, the prisoners who are standing are told to put their hands on their head and forced to sit and stand up repeatedly until they collapse from exhaustion, and if they do collapse, they are relentlessly slapped. An elderly grandmother who was 65 years old and next to me in the interrogation cell said she could not move any further, and she was immediately and mercilessly slapped and beaten, while another young girl and I had our heads bashed against the wall repeatedly. After the interrogation was over and while in transit to the prison cells, one of the prisoners had talked back to the security guard and we were then mercilessly kicked by the guard, who was wearing boots. We were placed in cells that were crawling with insects, and while trying to sleep at night, because the space was so limited, we literally had to sleep on top of other prisoners.

As a woman it is hard for me to describe what I saw and experienced, but I want to speak out today with courage for the countless North Korean refugees who have suffered under North Korea's evil and its violation of human rights. North Korean refugees swallow money wrapped in plastic when escaping to China. During arrest by the Chinese authorities and forced repatriation to North Korea and going to a prison, the money that is expelled naturally through defecation is peeled of its soiled plastic and swallowed again. Another way of hiding money for women is to hide the money in the womb or, in the anus. There was an incident at the 'bowibu' facility in Sinuiju, North Korea where a 16 year old girl's hymen ruptured and she was hemorrhaging blood. The 'bowibu' agent used a rubber glove to check for money or contraband in her vagina and due to the reckless searching the agent had ruptured her hymen. In their quest to search for money and rob the prisoners, they stopped at nothing, using all kinds of methods and means to do so. A lot of the women prisoners also attempted to give the money they took pains to hide to the security agents with the hope of being shown leniency or being let go.

I remember vividly what happened to a North Korean refugee woman who was pregnant with a baby conceived with a Chinese man, who was repatriated. The head 'bowibu' security agent cursed profanities at her, yelling at this woman that she was a "bitch who carried Chinese seed". He then proceeded to torture and beat her with steel hooks by hitting her on the side and the head, and forcing her to sit and stand repeated for five hundred times, until she collapsed. The North Korean agents continue to pour out obscenities at the woman lying on the floor, and after they picked her up and sat her down on the floor, the agents then beat her in the head with a wooden block and caused her nose to bleed, and her blood splattered all around her in the interrogation room. I saw this with my own eyes. Besides this one example, there were situations where we were bitten by bugs and we

suffered from inflammation; when the temperature got so cold and some prisoners were crying out in pain from frostbitten feet, the security guards would punish everyone in the cell.

When my family was repatriated for the last time, my mother was hauled to be tortured. Hearing our mother's blood-curdling screams, my sister and I froze instantly with fear, as if our hearts stopped. The head 'bowibu' agent began to torment and scare us by saying that if we told the truth, our mother would not be hit. Despite this we didn't dare open our mouths; he grabbed our heads by our hair and began hitting us. The pain that was inflicted on us was so bad we could not lay our head down properly to sleep for about two weeks.

Another form of punishment and torture I received in the interrogation room was where I was forced to kneel down and a wooden plank was placed between my thighs and between my bent legs; every time I answered 'NO' to a question I was kicked and that would cause me to bowl over. The plank that was placed was tremendously painful, and this was one way that I was tortured. Other forms of beatings and torture that I received after being forcibly repatriated by the Chinese authorities were in one instance, where I was forced to stand on tip-toes and then mercilessly kicked and beaten; kicked and beaten to unconsciousness while forced to kneel, and then the security agents would wake me up with water splashed from an ashtray. My own mother was beaten in the head with a log so harshly, pieces of her skull cracked, and because she was also severely beaten with fists by the security agents, her eardrum ruptured and to this day she is hard of hearing in one ear. All these methods of severe and cruel punishment were to try to find out whether the North Korean refugees had attempted to eventually escape to South Korea, or whether they had attended church or come into contact with Christians while in China. Our family I believe was miraculously saved through God's special grace and mercy. I also believe that God saved me so that I would be able to tell the world the plight of the North Korean people's unfair suffering, and the worst modern-day evil that is going on right now.

When I think of the almost three dozen North Korean refugees who will be experiencing torture and fear on a far worse scale than what I went through, I am filled with dread and fear, and my heart aches so much. The North Korean regime under Kim Jong Un has declared that any North Korean that attempts to escape during the mourning period for Kim Jong Il will be dealt with most severely, and these refugees who have embarrassed the regime and sought the world's attention to save them, will surely be punished to three generations and be given the harshest sentence, if they are repatriated by China.

I sincerely and earnestly request all of you here today, and for those throughout the world who will hear this Hearing, that the good fortune and privilege we have now of living in freedom, will become a reality for those more than 30 North Korean refugees currently being held by China, only through your combined attention and effort. I sincerely and earnestly request that you will help save the precious lives of these more than 30 North Korean refugees, lives that are more precious than anything in this world, through talking with the Government of China, even as they are pushing down people who are drowning and reaching out their hands to be rescued.

China & North Korea, Stop Killing People!!!

Thank you,

Jinhye Jo

March 5, 2012