

Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Testimony of Suzanne Scholte for Hearing March 5, 2012

Senator Sherrod Brown and Congressman Chris Smith and Members of the Commission, thank you for so quickly responding to the urgent crisis facing North Korean refugees recently arrested in China.

Congressman Smith, you will remember that in September you hosted a hearing with a North Korean defector, Kim Hye Sook, the longest serving survivor of the North Korean political prison camps. She spent twenty eight years in a political prison camp. I mention her today because the reason she was jailed at the age of 13 with her entire family in Bukchang political prison camp, where her brother and sister are still imprisoned, was simply because her grandfather allegedly had escaped to South Korea. She is a living example of how the regime retaliates against three generations of a family if just one family member flees North Korea.

As draconian as these measures have been, the current situation is even more critical for the North Korean defectors recently arrested in China, most face execution because of three factors. First, the Kim Jung Un regime announced in December that the entire family and relatives should be annihilated if any family member fled during the 100 day mourning period following Kim Jong Il's death.

Second, among the group of over thirty that were arrested in February are defectors who have family members who have successfully defected to South Korea. In fact, the parents of a 19 year old girl arrested in China have pleaded that their daughter be allowed to commit suicide rather than be repatriated to North Korea. There is also a 71 year old mother, who has a daughter in South Korea, and a mother and her 20 day old baby, as well as a 16 year old boy whose brother is in South Korea. In many cases, these refugees are trying desperately to be reunited with each other as they are the only survivors of families destroyed by starvation and persecution.

Third, China is providing information to North Korea about the intentions of the refugees it has arrested informing the North Korean security agents if these refugees were trying to flee to South Korea. Because of this collusion, the Chinese government is complicit in pre-meditated murder because it knows that those refugees, when repatriated to North Korea, face execution.

By refusing to honor its international treaty commitments and colluding with North Korea to repatriate these refugees, China has created a violent and lawless situation where eighty percent of North Korean females are subjected to human trafficking and North Korean agents are allowed to freely roam around China assassinating humanitarian workers and hunting down refugees.

Imagine this for a moment: the Chinese government, which wants to be seen as a responsible international leader, refuses to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whose sole purpose is to help nations address refugee problems, access to these refugees but has no problem allowing North Korean spies and assassins free reign.

This collusion between North Korea and China proves most definitely that China cannot hide behind its claim that these refugees are economic migrants, and not subjected to the international treaties China has signed.

China knows full well – and has known for decades – that when they force these North Koreans back to North Korea they face certain torture, certain imprisonment and increasingly execution for fleeing their homeland.

According to Kim Seong Min of Free North Korea Radio, which has informants in both North Korea's and China's security operations, China began separating North Korean defectors into two groups based on whether they were trying to escape to South Korea starting in at least 2008. We suspect this was part of the crack down before the Beijing Olympics and the enormous fear China had about the world coming to know about their cruel treatment of North Korean refugees.

Ju Seong-ha, a reporter for Donga-Ilbo and Kim Yong-hwa, the Representative of North Korean Defectors' Protection Association, both defectors themselves, have described how China uses a different color stamp on the interrogation papers for those defectors who were attempting to get to South Korea.

China is literally marking these refugees for death before they are repatriated.

We are at a critical point in this fight for the lives of the North Korean refugees and urgent action and attention is needed. If we do not convince China to reverse its repatriation policy and work with the international community on this issue, the refugees in China's custody face death.

In closing, I want to cite a number of arguments that should be used to convince China that it is in their best interest to follow their international treaty obligations and work with the international community. In fact, China is not only causing this refugee crisis, but prolonging it.

First, China fears an increasing flow of refugees if it allows refugees safe passage to South Korea, but China's actions are ensuring that there will always be refugees by relieving Kim Jong Un of taking any measures that would improve conditions in North Korea. The fact is that North Koreans are fleeing North Korea out of desperation. They know the considerable risk they are taking to flee to China but they keep risking their lives to pursue this action out of desperation. Furthermore, most North Koreans who have resettled in South Korea and other nations want to go back to North Korea once conditions improve in their homeland. China has desired that the Kim regime adopt China-style reforms but by forcefully sending fleeing North Koreans back to North Korea, China relieves any pressure for Kim to improve conditions in North Korea so the citizens do not want to flee.

Second, China's future will be much brighter for its people if its government works with South Korea rather than kowtows to the dictator in North Korea. The two countries celebrate the twentieth anniversary of their diplomatic ties this year and enjoy a robust trade relationship. South Korean culture is very popular in China, and many Chinese tourists travel to South Korea. Working with South Korea on this issue will have a positive benefit to their future relationship because it is inevitable that Korea one day will be reunified. With the increasing amount of

information flowing into North Korea and more and more North Koreans becoming aware of the truth, brutal dictatorship of Kim Jong-Un is doomed to end.

Third, all the remedies for resolving this issue are immediately at hand to ensure no burden on China including a UN sanctioned agency with an office in Beijing, the UNHCR; a humanitarian network and a strong commitment from South Korea and the United States to help resettle refugees.

Finally, China needs to be reminded of what this regime really thinks of the Chinese people. Kim Jong il had a long established policy known as “Block the yellow wind” –as he was resistant to adopting any China style reforms. His racist contempt for the Chinese people was evident in his ordering of his border guards to beat the bellies of pregnant North Korean females who had been repatriated because their unborn babies were half Chinese.

Now, that more and more people around the world are becoming aware of the North Korean refugee crisis and calling upon China not to force these refugees back to North Korea, this is a perfect opportunity for China to show great leadership and work with the international community, rather than kowtowing to a brutal dictatorship, frequently cited as one of the world’s worst regimes.

I want to close by recognizing one of your colleagues, Assemblywoman Park Sun Young of the Korean National Assembly, who began a hunger strike on February 21 across the street from the Chinese Embassy in Seoul calling for China not to repatriate these refugees and vowing to continue her vigil until death unless the North Korean refugees are allowed safe passage to Seoul. This brave woman collapsed on Friday and was rushed to the hospital. She understands the consequences for these refugees, and we hope that parliamentarians as well as governments around the world will join her in calling upon China to end their brutal repatriation policy and stop sending North Koreans to their death.

Submitted with this testimony

- 1) Letter to Hu Jintao by North Korean defector and reporter Seongha Ju, The Donga Daily
- 2) “Kkot Dong San” A Hill Filled with Flowers, an essay about the reeducation camp where tens of thousands were sent and died following repatriation from China
- 3) Red stamps for those escaping to South Korea for freedom? The behind-the-scene deal between China and North Korea

1) Letter to Hu Jintao by North Korean defector and reporter Seongha Ju, The Donga Daily
Translation of Letter published in Donga Ilbo on February 14, 2012

Dear President Hu Jintao,

The heartrending cry of the family of North Korean refugees arrested in China last week, encouraged me to write to you through this newspaper. Now you are the only person that can save their life.

I am also a refugee from North Korea that fled via China to South Korea through severe hardships. Feeling, with every fiber of my body and soul, the fear and agony of the refugees facing impending repatriation to North Korea, I am desperately writing this letter word by word, hoping this will be the last lifeline to which the arrested can resort.

China has, to date, repatriated arrested North Korean refugees to Pyongyang, and will also do the same this time.

Mr. President, however, please be noted that Pyongyang's punishment of the refugees has grown unprecedentedly and incomparably severe. Of recent, Pyongyang deems defection as the most serious menace to their regime, taking the most hawkish approach including on-the-spot execution of the refugees on the border.

The punishment has got even harsher since Kim Jong-Il's death, and Pyongyang reportedly even issued an instruction to annihilate the entire family and relatives of the refugees that defected during 100 days' mourning period. Under such atmosphere, it is as clear as daylight that the refugees will be subject to an exemplary execution or imprisonment in the concentration camp for political prisoners, immediately after being taken to North Korea.

China has been strengthening coordination with North Korea to prevent defection in various areas including putting barbed-wire fence on the border, tracking down refugees, patrolling the border, detecting the radio wave, etc.

China's concern about Pyongyang regime's stability, is not incomprehensible. No matter how it may be, however, by when will you assume the villain role to drive refugees to death? By when will you support the regime that cannot control its people without public execution and deadly concentration camps?

Throughout the last decade, tens of thousands of refugees were taken back from China to North Korea, many among whom have passed away from harsh punishment and famine. China also stands liable to their death. When will you realize the fact that China is losing North Koreans' public trust whenever you fell the refugees off the cliff of the death one by one?

Many of the arrested have their family in South Korea. Most of them are sons, daughters, parents and siblings of South Koreans. Among them is a teenager who has a brother and a sister in South but no other family in North. The brother and the sister are shivering like wounded deer in the corner of a room, off all food and drink, at the news that their younger brother, who they were to bring to South with the money they scraped up with hard shores at the cafeteria.

Parents of an arrested girl, crying bitterly in front of the South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pleaded to send poison to their daughter if her rescue is impossible. They want her to commit suicide in China rather than to be killed by cruel punishment in North Korea. Other family's feeling is just alike.

Their repatriation to Pyongyang will leave dozens of their family in South Korea in lifelong agony, nightmare and sense of guilt. There are tens of thousands of separated families in two Koreas already living like that. How can I describe their pain in mere writing?

Mr. President, this year we have the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea. Every Korean and the whole world are keeping keen eyes on you. Please allow them to meet their family again with joy. I desperately ask your generosity. Please let us all applaud you with deep appreciation.

Sincerely Yours,

Seongha Ju, Reporter of The Donga Daily

2) "Kkot Dong San" A Hill Filled with Flowers, an essay about the reeducation camp where tens of thousands were sent and died following repatriation from China

<http://blog.donga.com/nambukstory/archives/23738>

Sung Ha Joo 2/14/2012 8:00AM

There is a certain "Kkot-Dong-San."

It is a hill by a reeducation camp in Jungsan-kun, Pyong-Nam in North Korea. The reeducation camp is an imitation of the Soviet Union's forced labor camps in the past. Those who are sentenced to several years due to attempts at escaping must farm under the influence of hunger and ruthless whipping that one can hardly imagine.

If the people in these camps die from hunger or beating, they are buried in the Kkot-Dong-San. Tens of thousands of corpses are buried there. Several corpses are buried in a single hole, and when it's full, other corpses were buried over these graves. In the winter when the earth is frozen, the burial process becomes merely a covering process. The corpses are wrapped in a plastic wrap, and a penicillin bottle with the name and birthday is hung around each corpse's neck.

The human skull protruding from the ground as well as pieces of cloth and vinyl paper flapping with wind reminds one looking from afar of a flower field, which is why the reeducation camp prisoners call the hill "Kkot-Dong-San." It also reflects the prisoners' desperate wish to get away from hell at least in their deathbed.

Though often political prisoner camps are considered the epitome of North Korea's human rights violations, the reeducation camps are actually worse. Political prisoners are slaves for life. Slaves are assets. If they only work under the influence of whipping, they become very good workers. Products made from political prisoner camps are considered to have the best quality of all products in North Korea.

On the other hand, when they are released from the prisoner camps and enter reeducation camps, they are merely "human trash" to the North Korean elites. They would prefer seeing these prisoners die from persecution.

A woman who was arrested and taken to Jungsan reeducation camp in 2000 said that among 2000 people with whom she first entered the camp, only 200 people were still living after 7 months. It is the same with other reeducation camps. North Korean defectors who were in charge of disposing corpses in 1998 for six months said that they disposed of 859 corpses in total.

The majority will die due to malnutrition. In a reeducation camp, other living things such as rats and insects are on the verge of extinction because the prisoners put whatever they see alive into their mouths.

In reeducation camps, the day that one will finally die is estimated by a fist. If a fist can go in between your crack vertically, you are on your way to dying, if a fist can go in horizontally, you are dying, and if a fist can go in in both ways, you will not survive.

Just like that, I know so well what it is to be dying. I had also failed escaping and been classified as a political prisoner. As a result, I frequented the security department's torture chambers, prisons, and labor camps. Only when I was on the verge of death, weighing only 90 lbs, was I released.

After I came to South Korea, I have been writing about North Korea for 10 years. Many times I cried because I had experienced the same pain that other North Koreans are experiencing. To me, North Korea is pain and tears. I cannot step away from my keyboard if I think about my fellow North Koreans who are suffering and dying.

I received a list of North Korean refugees recently arrested in China. O, how painful...

Kim Jung Un declared that anyone defecting after Kim Jung Il died will have his or her family killed down to three generations. China does not feel guilty at all even after pushing the North Korean refugees close to death. The picture of "Kkot-Dong-San" where crows linger above the sad faces of those being sent back to North Korea is vivid in my mind.

I plead to you not just as a reporter, but also as a person who has experienced what a Hell is. If you happen to see an idol worship or group gymnastics performance and waves of other flowers in Pyongyang, please remember the labor reeducation camp "Kkotdongsan." Please don't forget the nameless dead who are being wrapped and buried in "Kkoddongsan"

Even if it's only once in a while... Please

3) Red stamps for those escaping to South Korea for freedom? The behind-the-scene deal between China and North Korea

<http://blog.donga.com/nambukstory/archives/24333>

2012/02/22 8:00 am Sungha Joo

It is discovered that in the process of deporting the North Korean refugees back to North Korea, the Chinese government has been informing to the North Korean government whether the captured refugees had escaped North Korea to head to South Korea or not.

There is a high possibility that the North Korean refugees who intended to escape to South Korea will either be detained in a political prisoners camp or be executed after they are deported. It was the North Korean government that told the Chinese government to determine the refugees' intended destinations.

The Tumen Public Security Bureau in China announced on the 21st that the Chinese Public Security Bureau has been receiving natural resources such as logs and minerals from North Korea in return for deportation of the refugees back to North Korea.

They (Tumen Public Security Bureau) said that "Recently China has been informing North Korea about the refugees intending to head to South Korea by using different colors of stamp on the files".

China has been using different colors of stamp that they agreed upon with North Korea each month, for example red in January and blue in February, instead of writing down "to South Korea", in order to avoid leaving obvious evidence that they have been assisting North Korea.

It is reported that due to the enlarging issue about refugees beyond the nation, China came up with this idea of using different colors of stamp to inform North Korea if the refugees were heading to South Korea.

When China had a good relationship with North Korea, they even handed over all the interrogation files to North Korea and moreover, during the late 1990's, it is witnessed that a North Korean investigator, disguised as a Chinese investigator, came over to China and interrogated the refugees.

The former North Korean lieutenant and the director of a North Korean broadcasting station, Sungmin Kim, said on the 21st that when he was being interrogated, "I was criticizing the political system of North Korea to a Chinese investigator who seemed to be compassionate and understanding, but later when I was being deported back to North Korea, the same man welcomed me back not as a Chinese investigator but as a North Korean personnel agent".

If China does not inform North Korea about the refugees' intent to escape to South Korea, the refugees will have a better chance in living even after they get deported. Since it is difficult for the North Korean refugee investigators to go over to China to investigate, the refugees only need to deny that they were intending on fleeing to South Korea and endure the tortures but could still spare their lives.

However, it is relatively easy to find out about the destinations of the refugees in China because the refugees hoping to head to South Korea are taken under custody along with the people who help them to their freedom.

It is reported that the Chinese government has been assisting in capturing the refugees and handpicked those who are to be executed and in return, they received logs and minerals from North Korea.

The bitter refugees witnessed that the compensations for the refugees change from time to time, but usually they consist of logs from Mt. Baekdu and iron ore from Musan mine. The exchange of the refugees and the natural resources started since 1998 and has continued until now like a tradition.

China sends back arrested North Korean refugees mainly through Tumen (located on the opposite side of Du-Man River in On-Sung, North Hamkyung Province) and Dandong (located on the opposite side of Ap-Nok River in Shin-ee, North Pyong-An Province). They also use any other bridges that connect China and North Korea.

Even at just Tumen, more than 3,000 refugees have been deported back to North Korea within a year. From this, it is estimated that more than 5,000 refugees are deported back to North Korea every year.

The Chinese government detains the refugees at the Tumen prisoner camp and when the camp fills up, they transport the refugees back to North Korea once or twice a week by buses. In the past, they used military trucks for the transportation, but since a lot of the refugees took their own lives by throwing themselves out the truck into the river at the bordering bridges, they changed trucks to buses.

Typically, refugees who are captured around Tumen like Yanji are deported back within two weeks, but if the refugees are captured somewhere farther away, the investigation takes longer. Tumen prisoner camp is meant for foreign criminals, but there are only refugees there now.

In this camp, North Korean refugees are repeatedly beaten and sexually harassed while they are stricken with fear before repatriation. North Korean refugees who have already experienced this prisoner camp said that at times, on the pretense of delaying repatriation, the camp officials rape the prisoners.