

**Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) Issues Roundtable  
April 19, 2004**

**Washington, D.C.**

**Statement of Suzanne Scholte**

**President of the Defense Forum Foundation**

Thank you to Chris Billing and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for arranging this panel discussion. I am honored to participate with these distinguished guests, Sang Hun Kim and Joel Charny, to discuss the plight of North Korean refugees in China.

One of the most avoidable and despicable tragedies of our time is occurring today in China as hundreds of thousands of starving North Korean men, women, and children have fled their homeland and crossed the border into China to try to survive. The famine which began in the mid-1990s has led to the deaths of over 3 million North Koreans.

The estimate of the number of North Korean refugees in China ranges between 50,000 to 350,000. Part of the problem in getting a more precise number is that the People's Republic of China will not allow access to this region, and even denies access to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in clear violation of the international treaties it has signed. Hence, information about the situation must come from those who risk being jailed by China to help these refugees, mostly people of deep religious conviction including Christian and Buddhist organizations.

The policy of the PRC is inhumane and should be condemned by all nations. In essence, we have a situation where a government is terrorizing starving, helpless refugees but also terrorizing humanitarian workers who are simply in China to feed and shelter these refugees.

Please understand that I fully acknowledge China's right to protect its borders and concern about the flood of refugees, but you have a wealth of humanitarian organizations who wish to alleviate this problem. In fact, two years ago we got letters of commitment from twelve humanitarian organizations who wished to help establish a refugee camp to help relieve China of any burden for these refugees. There are many organizations like Action Against Hunger and Doctors Without Borders that have left North Korea in protest of the government's diversion of their humanitarian aid, that would be more than willing to assist these North Koreans wherever they are.

There have been instances where the Chinese authorities did allow North Koreans to leave. Two families we were trying to help, the Han Mee Family in 2002 and a more recent example, the Zheng family in March, 2004, were allowed safe passage to South Korea via a third country. However, these are the rare exceptions, and every week between 100 to 200 North Koreans are repatriated.\*

China defends the repatriations by claiming that the refugees are "economic migrants" yet as soon as a North Korean crosses the border they immediately fit the definition of a political asylum seeker because it is a crime against the state for a North Korean to leave the country. I submit this paper written by Tarik Radwan, an attorney with Jubilee Campaign, which outlines the violations China is committing against North Korean refugees.

We know from eyewitness testimony that when North Koreans are repatriated they are subjected to harsh sentences, in some cases they are executed, especially if they have converted to Christianity. Since many Christians are willing to risk themselves to help these refugees, it is very common to hear of North Korean defectors converting to Christianity. Some, in fact, go back to North Korea to preach the gospel, which as you well know, is another crime against the state in North Korea, because Kim Jong-il considers Christianity to be the biggest threat to his God-head.

We know pregnant women who are repatriated are forced to undergo abortions. If the babies are born alive, they are suffocated, murdered on the spot. The crime that the baby committed is two-fold: he may have been the child of a Chinese man and he shares his mother's guilt for the crime she committed of leaving the country.\*\*

Now, in addition to repatriating North Koreans, China penalizes its citizens for trying to help North Korean refugees, and rewards them for turning them in -- a double incentive. It also works aggressively with North Korean agents to catch and jail humanitarian workers. In fact, the North Korean government offered an incentive to catch Hiroshi Kato of Life Funds for North Korean Refugees: 440,000 yen and a brand new Mercedes Benz. Kato was in fact caught in November 2002, and jailed, but fortunately the Japanese government stood up for him and he was released after less than a week in detention.

However, today there are at least ten humanitarian workers in Chinese jails -- ten that we know of. Since they must work clandestinely to try to save people's lives, there may be many others. Just to give you an example of these "lawbreakers" that China has in jail, let me describe just two of them:-- Rev. Dong Shik Kim who disappeared on January 16, 2000, and Takayuki Noguchi who was seized on December 10, 2003.

Rev. Kim is a devout Christian who felt a special compassion for the handicapped, poor and oppressed because he had himself been handicapped after a car accident in 1986. Working in China since 1988, he became well aware of the suffering of the North Korean people and organized five shipments of humanitarian aid to North Korea. He and his wife helped North Korean athletes go to compete in the 1996 Olympic Games. He was helping shelter refugees in China when on January 16, 2000, he was visited by three men who told them they wanted to take him to see a North Korean refugee couple who needed help. He served the three men lunch, and then the three men took Rev. Kim away and he has not been seen since.

Noguchi of Life Funds for North Korean Refugees was seized on December 10 with two Japanese born North Korean refugees. Noguchi is a 32-year-old humanitarian worker whose devotion to helping others led him to become involved in trying to rescue North Korean refugees. At the time he was caught, he was trying to help two Japanese born refugees return to Japan\*\*\*. Noguchi is in jail today being held by Chinese authorities for the crime of "illegally transporting people to cross the border."

Regarding the repatriations, we know of incidences where North Korean defectors have been murdered by Chinese border guards and North Korean agents. On May 28, 2002, North Korean agents beat to death Sohn In Kuk, a 40-year-old refugee who had fled North Korea after his entire family had starved to death. His crime was "crossing the border" too many times. Last week, according to Durihana Missionary Foundation, a Chinese border guard shot a North Korean defector who was with a group of at least 17 who were trying to make it to Mongolia.

This is the policy of China, which regards itself as a world leader, yet is committing one of the most despicable crimes against humanity in the world today.

Over the years, field surveys conducted by human rights organizations\*\*\*\* documented that over 50% of North Korean women have been subjected to human trafficking, sold as wives to Chinese farmers, sold as sex slaves to brothels, and sexually exploited. These statistics are now believed to be much higher, because now it is not just Chinese that are selling North Korean women and young girls but even desperate North Koreans are selling their own citizens.

Tim Peters of Helping Hands Korea believes that at least 70% and possibly 90% of North Korean refugee females have been victimized by trafficking. He described one such victim, Kim Mi-Soon. Kim's parents died and she was left to fend for herself until a woman from a nearby town offered to take Kim to China to live with her relatives. She went gratefully. It was not until she reached China that she discovered the deception: the woman sold her to a Chinese man. She was sexually abused, beaten and treated like a piece of property.

Despite the abuse, Kim considers herself very fortunate, because she will tell you: "I was only sold once. Most of the teenage girls from my home town, 15 and 16 year olds have been sold 3 and 4 times as sex slaves." Many of these young women are terrified to come forward to tell their stories because of the stigma that they have to live with for the abuse they endured.

Hae Nam Ji is another example. She decided to flee North Korea after she served time in a political prison camp for the "crime" of singing a South Korean song. Ji describes the several times she was sold. In one case the man who bought her was afraid she would try to escape while he was at work, so he took her to the factory where she was treated like an animal in a zoo, stared at and sexually molested by the man's co-workers.

Despite these horror stories, North Koreans keep fleeing to China. Time and time again, we hear the same story from them: "we would rather die than go back to North Korea."

Recently, over hundred North Korean defectors went on a hunger strike at the Tumen Facility in China to protest their pending repatriation. Tumen is considered the last stop for North Koreans about to be repatriated.

Having worked on this issue for some time and despite these horror stories, I am becoming encouraged by developments as more and more people and organizations raise their voices on this issue. As you know, the UN Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution last week regarding the horrible human rights situation in North Korea that called for the appointment of a Special Rapporteur.

Furthermore, Senators Sam Brownback and Evan Bayh, and Congressmen Jim Leach and Eni Faleomavaega have introduced the North Korea Freedom and the North Korea Human Rights Act in the U.S. Congress. Next week, the North Korea Freedom Coalition will host North Korea Freedom Day which includes a major rally on Capitol Hill and a day long series of events to promote North Korean human rights and freedom.

In conclusion, I feel we must apply worldwide pressure on China to stop the repatriations of North Korean refugees and allow the UNHCR and humanitarian organizations access to these refugees and the ability to set up refugee camps.

We should also pressure the Olympic Committee to change their venue for the 2008 Olympics unless China stop's its inhumane policy. It would be an enormously tragic farce to have the Olympic Games, which celebrate good will among neighbors, to be held in a country which is murdering and terrorizing its neighbors for their crime of coming to them for help.

Our country should also use its economic leverage with China to stop these atrocities. We know that we cannot appeal to China on morale grounds, but they do seem to respond to economic pressure. If our governments are not willing to help, than as individuals we should consider our own economic boycott of Chinese products.

I conclude with a plea to: "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, we knew nothing about this, does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done."\*\*\*\*\*  
Thank you.

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\*The Commission to Help North Korean Refugees and Helping Hands Korea

\*\*In North Korea, three generations of one's family is jailed if a family is accused of a so-called crime.

\*\*\*They had been part of the 93,000 Japanese born North Koreans who were lured back to North Korea during the years 1959-1984 to help build the great socialist paradise of North Korea

\*\*\*\*Good Friends and the Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights

\*\*\*\*\*Proverbs 24: 11-12.

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Suzanne Scholte is President of the Defense Forum Foundation and Chairman of North Korea Freedom Day being sponsored by the North Korea Freedom Coalition. She is also a Founding Board Member of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea and a Founding Member and Advisor of the North Korea Freedom Coalition. DFF is the U.S. partner of the Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights and the Society to Help Returnees to North Korea. In addition to raising awareness of the human rights issues in North Korea, DFF has also established the Sin U Nam Fund in which 100% of the donations are used to rescue refugees and provide support to NGOs sheltering refugees.