

Day 1 - North Korean Government and Their Leader, Kim Jong II

Many have said that North Korea is the most rigidly controlled place on Earth. It is an oppressive, classically totalitarian nation that, like other absolutist states, has no tolerance for any kind of dissent or even discussion of political and economic issues.

People

The approximate 23 million North Koreans are made up of 99% Korean and 1% Chinese ethnic groups, most in the western lowland plains. About 60% of the people live in the cities. Freedom of movement, assembly, and association are strictly controlled; people live a life of repression and fear.

Politics

Kim Jung II, the "Dear Leader," is head of the country. The government indoctrinates and fosters its ideology through education and culture. Kim II Sung, the deceased father of Kim Jong II and known as the "Great Leader," has been exalted and revered as a god to be followed with obedience. Newspapers, radio and TV are under control of the government run Korean Central News Agency. The dominant political party and source of power is the Korean Workers Party.

Religion

About 70% of the people are non-religious. Religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution, but in reality genuine religious activity is prohibited and Christians are considered a threat to the regime. The Bible is banned in North Korea. The majority of the people have never heard the Word of God, seen a church, or heard about Jesus Christ. Many Christians are in prison camps because of their faith in Jesus Christ. North Koreans have been taught to regard Christians as "crazy people."

Economy

North Korea has a doctrine of self-reliance and has downgraded the role of foreign trade. All industry is nationalized and the agriculture is collectivized. North Korea has many reserves of coal, iron ore, tungsten and graphite and there are many conifer forests in the mountain regions. Their principle crops are rice, corn, potatoes and other vegetables. However, most of the soil in NK lacks organic material and is relatively infertile, a challenge for the approximately 38% of the people who are engaged in agriculture.

Notable Distinctions

- This is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the world.
- North Korea is one of the richer nations in terms of mineral resources.
- Once there were many Christians and Buddhists, a time when North Korea was called the Jerusalem of the East.
- Estimates vary on the number of deaths in North Korea due to the sever famine. Some estimates claim 3 million deaths since the famine began in 1995; the highest estimates are close to a million deaths per year. North Korea's political isolation from the rest of the international community has made it difficult to have reliable data.

Life in North Korea

President Kim Jong II uses starvation as a means of controlling entire classes of people in order to suppress opposing viewpoints and to persecute anyone known to have religious beliefs. In most rural areas there is no medicine, running water, heating, food, or bandages. In stark contrast, the capital city of Pyongyang glitters with nightclubs, casinos, luxury hotels, gourmet restaurants and state-of-the-art hospitals for leading Party members and the ruling elite.

While the political leaders in North Korea enjoy an opulent lifestyle, the average North Korean struggles to find food to survive. Furthermore, there is little access to basic medical care. As a result, many curable diseases go untreated, leading to crippling disease, loss of limbs or mobility, or often death.

North Korea's leadership spends at least one-third of the nation's resources on the military. To justify this military-first policy, Kim Jong IL created a pathologically maniacal, permanent crisis mentality in which the United States, Japan and South Korea are demonized as enemies. An incredibly complex tapestry of lies is told to the North Korean people that deifies the leadership and its inner circle, and rationalizes the people's many sacrifices to sustain a level of military spending that is entirely disproportionate to the size of the nation.

Both men and women must serve in the military, North Korean men spend a substantial portion of their adult life in the military, being drilled to hate the United States which is blamed for the division of the Korean Peninsula.

Please Pray:

- That God will soften the heart of Kim Jong IL to have compassion on and extend freedom to his people.
- That God will reveal Himself to members of the regime and that they would use their position and influence for the glory of God, no longer for the glory of Kim Jong II.
- That Kim Jong II will lose his power over the minds of the North Korean people and that the people will be liberated from such psychological bondage.
- That the regime will consistently fail in their many attempts to stifle Christianity and to destroy the spirit and freedom of the people.
- For the North Korean defectors in South Korea as they begin planning ways to transform North Korea into a prosperous and free democracy.
- That God will raise up new leaders with the fear of God in their hearts and love for their people.
- That the future leadership will take a strong stand in recognition of the need for confession of guilt, repentance and reconciliation for the regime's many crimes against its people.
- That the U.S. and South Korean governments will have the wisdom and courage to support freedom and human rights for all North Koreans.

"Show the wonder of your great love, you who saved by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me."

- Psalm 17: 8, 9

Day 2 - Prisoners

North Korea is often described as one huge prison, but in fact, there are various types of prisons distinguished by finely calibrated levels of brutality. Kim Jong Il describes those who have even passively opposed his rule as “cancers that must be cut out.” In North Korea this means death or prison. Punishment is not limited to the offender, but also three generations of the offender’s family.

North Koreans can be imprisoned for virtually any state-defined crime, such as being a Christian, making a negative comment about the regime, traveling to China to look for food, failing to have a picture of Kim Il-Sung in their house or even failure to keep it clean enough. What compounds these situations for citizens are the severe violations of human rights that occur throughout the North Korean penal system, including:

- Systematic use of torture
- Public and private executions
- Use of humans for chemical and biological weapons research and testing
- Arbitrary and brutal imprisonment
- No due process of law
- Extreme deprivation and starvation; use of caste system
- Extreme racism and nationalism
- Forced abortions to refugees possibly impregnated by non-Korean men

Prison Camps

More than 200,000 prisoners are being held in just five of the 12 prison camps of North Korea. The number of additional prisoners who are imprisoned in the other known and unknown prisons, some of which are said to be completely underground, is unknown. These political prisoners are kept under constant threat of execution, and all of the prison camps have facilities that would enable their captors to kill them rapidly, as in the case of an outside penetration by another country.

In addition, North Korea’s State Security Agency maintains about 30 labor education and forced labor camps. Some camps are similar in population to U.S. counties. At least two of these camps are larger in area than the District of Columbia. There is an estimated 50-70,000 Christians being held in labor camps.

Food for Prisoners

Throughout the whole country of North Korea, there is a shortage of food, but in the prison camps, the deprivation is much worse. The famine in North Korea is a man-made disaster by the regime of Kim Jong Il. The majority of food aid is used to feed the military and those loyal to the regime. Thus, food aid rarely reaches the prisoners. Prisoners must perform hard labor and are given below subsistence levels of food. According to Kang Chul Hwan, a prison survivor, these camps are really death camps because prisoners are worked to death. A vast number of prisoners die from starvation and from being overworked while malnourished. In order to survive, prisoners must catch and eat any animal they can find, such as snakes and rats. This is how Kang survived the prison camps as a child.

Children in Prison Camps

As soon as parents are arrested, their children are sent with them to the same prison camps where they then face an abysmal existence. They are forced into hard labor, to which some of their little bodies succumb to the physical toll. At the drop of a hat, they are beaten or kicked. Children are also mentally abused. In addition, they have to cope with the illness and death of friends and family members. They are given so little to eat that the only way to stay alive is to steal food. For stealing, they can be severely punished. Not many children survive the prison camps, and any who do remain alive are severely traumatized.

Russian Labor Camps

There are many North Koreans imprisoned in Russia. North Korea is paying off its debts to Russia with free labor. These prisoners are working without the protection of the law but remain under the supervision of the Korean security forces. Workers are housed, fed, and controlled by North Korean officials. A Russian foreign ministry spokesman said that the workers do not fall under Russian law, because the two countries do not have any agreement about working conditions. Neither country acknowledges any obligation to uphold certain work conditions. A report by Amnesty International reveals that Korean workers in the north of Russia are working for little or no wages, are sleeping in rudimentary barracks, and are severely punished for any disobedience.

Chinese Detention Centers

There are detention centers in China to imprison North Korean refugees who flee there. Unlike North Korea's political prisons, there is a greater chance to get out of these camps alive. Here is the testimony of a Korean woman caught traveling between China and North Korea and imprisoned in a Chinese detention center.

"My mother and I accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and we regularly held secret family meetings in our home. When I was in China in order to see fellow Christians, I was arrested and sent to a detention center. Thanks to the help of a (Chinese) Christian, I got out after seventy days.

In that camp, I was very badly treated. I was not even allowed to look up without permission, and I had to spend the whole day kneeling down. I was often taken for questioning. Then I was terribly beaten and verbally abused. When they were treating me like this, I always prayed out loud to God for help. Then they tortured me even more, but I could not give up my faith. I prayed especially for the salvation of my torturers, because they did not know that what they were doing was against the will of the heavenly King.

Those guards regarded us as animals and treated us like animals. They used to beat us with iron rods, even in the face, and sometimes they would throw us against an iron girder for so long that we were bleeding severely. Through the grace of God, I was able to witness to some of my fellow prisoners about God's love, and we prayed together for His special guidance and support. After I was released, I could no longer return home because I was wanted. I now live like a wild animal in the mountains."

Please Pray:

- For the hundreds of thousands of North Koreans who are currently being detained and tortured in one of North Korea's twelve Soviet-modeled prison camps.
- That all imprisoned North Koreans will be released.
- For the abolishment of these camps and their use.
- For physical, psychological and spiritual healing for those who have suffered in the camps.
- That the prison administrators and guards will have compassion on the prisoners, and that they will stop the torture, beatings, forced abortions, and other cruel treatment.
- That the doctors will recognize the evil of using prisoners for chemical and biological weapons experiments and stop.
- That those who are starving in the camps will find food and be nourished, and that all prisoners will have daily access to food.
- For strength and stamina for the prisoners to be able to perform the hard labor required of them.
- For the protection of women prisoners from rape, and for healing and restoration for those who have already been sexually assaulted by guards or other inmates.
- That those imprisoned in China will be freed without getting deported back to North Korea.
- That those suffering in these camps will feel God's presence in the midst of such injustice.
- That imprisoned North Korean Christians will be able to bring the love and light of Jesus Christ into these dark prisons.
- For greater awareness of these prisons to spread throughout the free world so that enough international pressure will be generated to shut these prisons down.

"May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die." - Psalm 79: 11

"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." - Hebrews 13: 3

Day 3 - Famine

North Korea has been facing a severe food shortage since the mid 1990's. According to Amnesty International, this crisis developed for a number of reasons including:

- Constraints within the country's economic system
- The collapse of strategic economic ties following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991
- The decline in trade with China following its normalization of relations with South Korea
- Natural disasters including famine and floods
- Human rights abuses

As a communist country, North Korea does not allow any privately-owned businesses or trade that is not regulated by the government. The government developed a system to distribute food through the Public Distribution System (PDS), a controlled way of distributing food based on one's occupation. Those loyal to the party or who serve in the army have better access to food, but those who are considered wavering or hostile receive little to no food. Kim Jong II uses starvation as a means of controlling entire classes of people, suppressing opposing viewpoints and persecuting anyone known to have religious beliefs.

First Signs of Hunger

The first real signs of a food shortage were seen by the international community in 1991. The PDS started cutting rations in the mid 1990s and, during 1998, completely stopped distributing any food. The Korean people were forced to eat grass, roots, and anything even remotely edible that they could find to survive. During this time, the North Korean government tolerated the emergence of a black market where people could buy and sell food and goods outside of the government's control. Many people fled to China to look for food and jobs so they could support their families and escape starvation.

Estimates vary on the number of deaths in North Korea due to the severe famine. Humanitarian relief experts estimate that between two and four million North Koreans have died of starvation since 1995, despite the fact that North Korea receives more food aid than any nation in the world. The highest estimates however are close to a million deaths per year. North Korea's political isolation from the rest of the international community has made it difficult to have reliable data.

The crisis is only compounded in the many prison camps where prisoners do not even receive enough food to survive. The majority of prisoners slowly starve to death as they are forced to perform hard labor. Lee Young Kuk, former bodyguard to Kim Jong-II, says that millions of dollars of food is stockpiled in military complexes and used to feed soldiers and the ruling elite, even though millions of people are barely surviving throughout the rest of North Korea.

A Report by the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea entitled "Hunger and Human Rights: The Politics of Famine" concluded that the lack of political and civil liberties were a direct factor in the famine leading to millions of deaths. The report blamed the regime for blocking humanitarian aid to the hardest hit parts of the country during the peak

of the famine and curtailing commercial imports once humanitarian assistance began. Simple policy adjustments could have averted the famine and food shortages. Instead, Kim Jong-Il used the humanitarian aid as a weapon against the North Korean people.

Results of Hunger

North Korean children are the ones who suffer the most from this food shortage. Infant mortality and malnutrition rates are extremely high in North Korea. There also are many street children. They scrounge for every grain of rice on the ground at the local markets, but most often are driven away without having had anything to eat.

A commonly stated comparison of North Korean and South Korean children illustrates the effects of the food shortage. Even though they come from the same genetic heritage, in South Korea, an average 7-year-old boy is 4 ft 1" tall and weighs 57 lbs; his brother in the North is about 8 inches shorter and 22 lbs lighter.

There are also numerous reports by refugees of the rise of cannibalism within North Korea as desperate people seek to survive. This "meat" is sold in common markets, and although North Koreans know that it is human flesh, people refuse to speak about it. The penalty for these merchants is execution, but the sale of human flesh continues. There are reports of children mysteriously disappearing, body parts being found in local restaurants, and even new graves being dug up when people steal the bodies.

Aid for Those in Hunger

The food crisis persists in North Korea with no end in sight. South Korea gives fertilizer and materials for North-South projects. China delivers energy assistance to North Korea. Also, international and non-governmental organizations are providing significant amounts of food. The U.S. provided more than two million tons of food aid between 1996 and 2005, the majority of which has been delivered through the UN World Food Program.

In March 2009 however North Korea refused to accept future U.S. food aid and has also expelled five groups that distribute American aid in the country. State Department spokesman Robert Woods told reporters that no reason was given for rejecting U.S. food aid. North Korea is one of the poorest countries in the world, with about 9 million people – mostly children, pregnant and nursing women and the elderly – needing urgent food assistance, according to the World Food Program.

"Even the children are subject to forced labor, and about one third of them die of malnutrition and heavy labor. I also suffered from malnutrition three months after being imprisoned, lacking even the strength to walk. Because we were not given any source of protein, we would catch and eat snakes, frogs, or even worms in order to survive. At first, I did not want to taste these things. One day my friends caught some rats while working in the fields and roasted them on an open fire. That was the first time I tasted rat meat, and that one piece of rat meat sustained me. From then on I ate anything to survive: rats, frogs, snakes, and worms. Prisoners who do not do this could die in less than a year. People like me who are able to eat anything can survive longer."

- Kang Chol-Hwan, North Korean defector and human-rights activist

Please Pray:

- For Greater awareness of this situation throughout the international community.
- That increased awareness will result in heightened levels of pressure on the North Korean government to stop using starvation as a means to maintain power over the people.
- That the organizations that are still allowed to operate in North Korea will be able to continue distributing food to all North Koreans.
- For effective monitoring of food distribution in North Korea so that the food actually reaches those who are starving and is not just saved for the military, party and friends of the party.
- That God will literally give the people their daily bread, and that even those in the remotest parts of the country will have sufficient access to food.
- For rainfall and that God will multiply this year's harvest.
- For the protection of the people who risk their lives every day to obtain food for their families.
- That those who flee to China to obtain food will be successful and able to return to their families without getting caught.
- That God will provide food for the many street children; that others will assist them; and that even the authorities will allow food to be given to these children.
- For an end to all acts of cannibalism and for protection upon those whose lives are in danger of being used for food.
- For an end to black market sales of human meat and body parts, and that those involved in these markets will be prevented from continuing their business and that they will ultimately repent and gain knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- That Satan will no longer have a stronghold over this situation, and that God will be glorified when the nation and its people are restored and able to live freely in a land of plenty.

"[The Lord] executes justice for the oppressed; [He] gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous; The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked." – Psalm 146:7-9

Day 4 - Religious Persecution

The capital of North Korea is Pyongyang. This city was once known as the Jerusalem of the East. In 1945, thirteen percent of the population was Christian. Things have drastically changed since Kim IL Sung imposed communism on North Korea.

In North Korea, you are not allowed to express your faith freely, and the regime ensures that only people who are loyal to the government live in the capital. Between 1945 and 1950, the North Korean government executed or arrested all of the country's religious leaders. The government created a class system with three main categories: core, wavering, or hostile, with 51 sub-categories. All religious families were classified hostile, and placed in classes 34-37. Religious families were relocated to industrial cities on the east coast or sent to forced labor camps for political prisoners.

Despite virtually no freedom of religion in North Korea, the government has four "show" churches to demonstrate to tourists that there is freedom of religion in the country. There is one Catholic Church, one Orthodox Church, and two Protestant churches in Pyongyang. North Koreans must receive permission to attend these churches and, according to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom report titled "Thank you, Father Kim IL Sung," the waiting list is very long.

Religious Freedom Without Limitations?

The North Korean authorities claim that religious freedom exists without limitations in North Korea. Yet the authorities arbitrarily interpret and apply the constitution in such a way that creates limitations to the free exercise of religion.

Another inhibition imposed by the NK government is the requirement for approval for "construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies." Without a building one cannot practice or assemble for religious practices; without a permit they cannot construct a building. The USCIRF used extensive interviews with 40 individuals who formerly lived in North Korea to obtain this information on the status of religious freedom within the country. All interviewees claimed four main reasons for the lack of religious freedom in North Korea:

1. While residing in North Korea, all of its citizens had been exposed to intensive and continuous anti-religious propaganda.
2. Religious activity was explicitly banned and none knew of any authorized religious activity inside North Korea.
3. All had heard about or personally witnessed cases of severe persecution of persons caught engaging in religious activity.
4. All presented the understanding that Juche, the official state ideology of Kim IL Sung's Revolutionary Thought, was the only officially sanctioned system of religious or ideological thought in North Korea.

The Official Religious System

In the spiritual vacuum created by the suppression of all religion, Kim IL Sung created a monolithic belief system that became the basis for a personality cult in North Korea mimicking Japanese "emperor worship." This belief system is called Juche, which is usually translated as "self-reliance," according to USCIRF. Kim Jong IL refers to Juche as "Kimilsungism." This belief system twists the Holy Trinity of Christianity by teaching that

Kim IL Sung is god, his son Kim Jong IL is the Christ figure, and the ideology of Juche replaces the Holy Spirit.

According to USCIRF, all North Koreans are indoctrinated with this belief system from the cradle to the grave. Their entire education includes this teaching, and as adults they are required to attend mandatory adult education centers in their work places or in their towns

Penalties for Engaging in Religious Practices

There are severe penalties for being caught practicing religion or caught with religious materials including public execution. A number of North Korean defectors have either witnessed these types of executions or heard of them. Others are either tortured to death or imprisoned in the North Korean gulags where they are forced to perform hard labor and given less than subsistence levels of food. Most people of faith do not survive the gulags; even if they escape public execution, they eventually succumb to starvation, exhaustive hard labor, and being subjected to disease and extreme weather exposure with no hygiene, medical care, or proper clothing.

When North Korean refugees are caught in China or South Korea, the authorities are especially concerned with finding out which ones have been exposed to religion. These people are singled out for a more severe level of punishment. Despite these difficulties there is evidence to suggest that the church is actually growing in North Korea.

Religious Assembly

It is difficult to imagine, but even in North Korea, people of faith still meet together to worship and practice their faith. The church is alive and growing in North Korea as the famine triggered much refugee flow between China and North Korea allowing Christianity to spread. Recent directives by Kim Jong- II strongly confirm this as he considers Christianity his greatest threat. There are three types of Christians in North Korea according to the USCIRF:

1. The pre-WWII Christians and their children who are members of the Party/state sponsored churches and home worship centers.
2. The pre-WWII Christians who maintained their faith by practicing in secret. Treatment of these people is evidence that North Koreans do not actually believe they have religious freedom or they would have publicly declared themselves as Christians.
3. New converts who have had contact with the Chinese and South Korean Christians. This is absolutely illegal and the police search for these converts. It is perilous for these new converts because, if they are caught, they will receive the treatment outlined above.

The chance of being betrayed is a significant likelihood. Religious believers have to watch out for the state security, but also for fellow citizens. They often do not even tell their own children about the secret meetings, because children are encouraged at school to betray their parents.

Defector Quotes USCIRF

"I never thought that Juche or Kimilsungism was closed or oppressive ideology, but I simply believed it as truth.... I also thought Kim IL Sung is the greatest man who created such a great ideology. I believed that Kim IL Sung provided for all our needs.... During all my life, I was brainwashed, believing that Kim IL Sung was the only reason I was happy. I learned to say, 'Thank you, father Kim IL Sung,' even when I was a baby. Therefore it is impossible to think of anything else but Kimilsungism.

"It has never been allowed to not follow Kimilsungism. Everyone must follow.

"There are Kim IL Sung Revolutionary Thought Study Institutes and Revolutionary History Institutes in even the smallest unit of administration or organization. Everybody is forced to attend there once a week at the assigned time. Hanging portraits of Kim's family is compulsory for every household...People bring flowers and clean up around the public statues and portraits of Kim IL Sung."

Please Pray:

- For religious freedom for all North Koreans.
- For the breakdown of the Juche ideology, and that it's dominion over the North Korean people will collapse.
- That those who have been brainwashed will become disillusioned with Kim Jong II's self-claimed godhood and begin their own search for truth.
- Especially for the children—that God will extend his shield of mercy around them to protect their minds and hearts from growing cold under such rigid godless indoctrination.
- For the penetration and increasing availability of more outside information through radio, video, literature, and word of mouth.
- That Kim Jong II's power to suppress the thoughts and beliefs of the people will be overturned by the faith and courage of those who have discovered their right to worship freely.
- That the gospel will be able to penetrate every part of the country, and that every North Korean will have the chance to hear and know the truth.
- For the perseverance and boldness of North Korean believers to share their faith and strengthen others around them.
- That believers will be able to teach the word of God to their children without fear of being betrayed to authorities by their own flesh and blood.
- For the Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith, that they will be able to bring the love of Christ into those dark prison camps.
- That God will draw near to the persecuted, sustaining His followers and calling all others to a relationship with Him.
- That the persecuted North Korean believers will find comfort and rest in the future glory that will be theirs for suffering and sacrificing their lives for Christ.

"You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake."
- Jeremiah 15:15

Day 5 - Refugees

Thousands of North Koreans have fled to China in search of a better life. Some try to leave permanently as they seek freedom or flee religious persecution, and others cross the border in search of jobs or food so they can return and support their starving families in North Korea. North Koreans cross the Tumen River, usually in the winter when it's frozen, to enter China. It is estimated that between 100,000 and 300,000 North Korean refugees are hiding in China.

Reaching China does not mean freedom for refugees because China has an agreement with North Korea to forcibly repatriate all refugees. Since leaving North Korea is a capital offense, China's policy essentially sends refugees to their death. Refugees who are forcibly repatriated to North Korea are brutally interrogated. Depending on their responses, they are either executed or imprisoned in one of North Korea's many political prison camps.

China is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Refugee Convention dictates that China should grant access to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the region between China and North Korea, where most of the refugees are in hiding, and also to allow the UNHCR a role in determining the status of the refugees. China refuses to allow the UNHCR this access to the border region and to the refugees. The Chinese government justifies their actions by calling the refugees "economic migrants," people who are just seeking a higher standard of living.

Refugee Status Outside North Korea

Since China is an ill-fated destination for North Korean refugees, they must continue until they reach South Korea or another country which will grant them refugee status. These refugees are at great risk for abuse in China because the local population can threaten to turn them in to the local police if they do not cooperate. The result is that 70-90% of North Korean women are victimized by trafficking and forced into sex brothels, or are sold to men as sexual slaves or wives. Some refugees are forced into slave labor.

Refugees who are able to remain in hiding often live in caves in the countryside and are forced to forage for roots to eat. They are at great risk to starvation, exposure, and illness. Some refugees are able to assimilate into the Chinese-Korean population on the border, while others are being sheltered in safe houses run by Christians NGOs.

If a refugee is caught and repatriated to North Korea, they are asked specific questions regarding their contact with Christians. Of course, they are asked where they crossed into China, where they went, what they did, etcetera. Specifically, they are asked two questions. The first question is if the refugee had attended a Korean-Chinese church. The second question is if they had any contact with South Koreans in China who were representatives of religious organizations doing charitable and humanitarian work in the border area. Those who affirmed this contact were either executed or treated more severely than others who were repatriated.

MRS. PARK SOON-HEE'S LETTER TO THE WORLD: A LETTER FROM A REFUGEE

*"That b***** will try to run away to South Korea unless her feet and calves are rotted and crumbled," the prison guards used to say while mercilessly striking me. Each time, I swore to myself, "I will crawl to the South, if I have to, and tell about today. I will tell all the*

crimes committed by this Kim Jong Il band." This resolve grew stronger each time they tormented me. Each day, I watched my rotting feet and prayed this Kim band will soon rot away like my feet.

I used to live in a small town in Southern Hamgyong Province with my family until 2000, when my son and I defected to Jangchoon, China. After nearly 3 years of aimless life, I started to go to South Korea through Mongolia. But I was arrested by Chinese police on my way and soon was repatriated to my hometown. When the police in my home town found out that I tried to go to the South they started to attack my body until I bled through my eyes and then trampled my already swollen feet. Soon, my feet were severely injured and they started to rot.

Before long, my body turned blue and it began to swell, making me look uglier than any human being or animal. The guards had fun while striking and trampling my body. About a month later, the guards noticed I was getting worse with my body turning to black. They felt I was in the hopeless case and soon released me for home treatment.

After rest and treatment at home, I decided to set out to China again with the help of two walking sticks. I starved and crawled but made it to China. When my son and his friends met me, they cried while holding my feet, but I didn't cry. Now I can have my feet treated and look for a chance to go to the South. It is my seventh month in China, waiting for that chance. So far, I have only seen the threat of Chinese police ready to jump on me at their first chance. The anxiety drives me nearly insane. Every day, I look at southern sky. Waiting. Hoping. And praying. Please help me. Please help me to reach my dream. Please pray for me. –

**Mrs. Soon-Hee now resides in a safe country.*

Prayer Requests

- Pray for divine protection for refugees who are escaping North Korea and for those hiding in China. Pray for wisdom on which routes to take and to which countries the refugees should go.
- Pray for wisdom and protection for the Christians, missionaries, and humanitarian workers who are helping to care for these refugees.
- Pray for the refugees in China that they will escape the exploitive situations many of them are in. Pray specifically for the women who are being sexually exploited and for the refugees who are being used for slave labor. Pray that God would change the hearts of their exploiters.
- Pray also for the border guards, that their seeing eyes may be made blind, and that many people will flee North Korea and will be able to build better lives for themselves outside of North Korea.
- Pray for the people who, after such dreadful attempts to flee, feel like survivors in South Korea. Pray that they will be able to adjust and that the stress and depression will disappear. Pray that they will be able to learn the South Korean dialect and that they will be able to adjust to their new lives in freedom.
- Pray that China will allow the UNHCR to have access to the North Korean refugees and that they will stop the forcible repatriation of these refugees.

"Make your shadow like night – at high noon. Hide the fugitives; do not betray the refugees.... The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land." - Isaiah 16:3-4

Day 6 - Underground Railroad and Activists

Like the Underground Railroad that ushered African Americans to freedom in the northern states of the U.S., an underground railroad exists to help North Korean refugees in China escape to a safe third country where they can gain asylum. Although China is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, China refuses to allow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) this access to the border region and to the refugees.

The "Refugee Convention" dictates that China should grant access to the region between China and North Korea where most of the refugees are in hiding and also allow the UNHCR a role in determining the status of the refugees. Instead of maintaining the integrity of their written commitment to the UN Convention, China actively looks for North Korean refugees to repatriate to their country. North Korean agents are permitted by the Chinese government to operate in the border towns so they can also assist in hunting down North Korean refugees.

As more people learned of this horrendous situation, activists began coordinating efforts to help refugees escape China through the Underground Railroad. There are numerous routes that have been developed to help refugees escape to Mongolia, South Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Some activists assist by traveling with the refugees, creating false travel documents, and safe houses. Other activists are involved in receiving refugees into their homes, churches and safe houses. The activists hide, feed, clothe, and assist refugees until they are able to make the rest of their journey to a safe country. Most refugees ultimately try to go to South Korea where they can usually obtain asylum and government assistance for adjusting to their new lives in freedom.

Activists Help North Korean Refugees

The majority of the activists are Christians sent by churches in South Korea and America to help their fellow believers in China. Some activists are local, ethnic Koreans who live in China.

The word has spread among refugees that they can seek refuge at Christian churches where they are often assisted. The danger is that North Korean and Chinese agents pose as pastors or Christians to lure the North Koreans out of hiding to capture them and to collect financial rewards for turning them in. In addition to financial incentives for turning in refugees, there are penalties and imprisonment for Chinese citizens who are caught sheltering refugees.

Furthermore, Chinese police are guaranteed advancement for capturing North Korean refugees. There are even reports of mock churches being set up to attract and capture refugees. With all of these obstacles, many refugees are captured and sent back to prison camps or to be executed. Those who endure prison camps are blacklisted for their attempted escape and most will flee again and again until they are either murdered or they reach safety.

North Korean agents have also abducted missionaries and activists helping the North Korean refugees. One such man is Rev. An Sung who was commissioned by a Pentecostal Church in Seoul to take the gospel to North Korea. However, Rev. An Sung was abducted by North Korean agents in China in 1995 and was imprisoned on charges of spying. Another is Kim Dong Shik who was abducted from China by North Korean agents in 2000. Pastor Kim's family claim that he died within a year of being kidnapped and are campaigning for his ashes to be sent home.

The Chinese government is also guilty of imprisoning activists in China who help the North Korean refugees. There are approximately 200 missionaries imprisoned in China including South Koreans and Americans.

Please Pray:

- For divine security over those involved in the Underground Railroad and for the operation as a whole.
- For the development and maintenance of more routes, passages and safe houses within China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and South Korea.
- That more men and women will rise up to assist these refugees struggling for freedom and survival.
- That activists already engaged in this work will be able to continue assisting these refugees without being caught and imprisoned.
- That activists will have access to all the necessary resources to carry out their critical work.
- That despite their own chances of being persecuted for their Christian faith, more and more Chinese Christians will courageously lay their freedom and lives on the line to help refugees.
- That, when meeting with Christians on the Underground Railroad, the refugees will be able to see the love of Christ in them and come to know Him personally.
- That God will guide the refugees to genuine churches and safe houses.
- For divine orchestration of meetings and conversations that will allow refugees to meet with believers.
- That those North Korean and Chinese authorities posing as pastors and activists will be obstructed from meeting any refugees or real activists.
- For the protection and release of the activists who have been imprisoned in China.
- That those who have been abducted and taken to North Korea will also be freed and that God will guard their lives as they most likely endure extremely harsh treatment at the hands of the North Korean regime.
- For the strength, hope, and faith of these courageous activists, and that they will take refuge in the power, love and future glory of Jesus Christ.
- For God to touch the hearts of those in authority in countries where refugees are fleeing including China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia to allow the refugees safe passage.
- That God will be glorified through the love shown these refugees, and that every act of courage and compassion will bring glory to Him.

"Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." - Isaiah 1:17

Day 7 - Asylum

In 2004 the U.S. Congress unanimously passed the North Korean Human Rights Act. This was a huge victory for those seeking to improve the lives of North Koreans. The purpose of this legislation was to increase cooperation in refugee protection and human rights and to improve transparency in distribution of humanitarian aid in North Korea. This law emphasizes the priority of human rights in negotiations with North Korea and authorizes funding for programs that promote democracy, a free market economy, human rights, and freedom of information. In addition, it authorized increased funding for North Korean refugees such as trafficking victims and orphans. The legislation demanded greater transparency in the delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid in North Korea to ensure it was being used properly. One of the most important points is that it affirmed the eligibility of North Koreans to be granted refugee status under U.S. law.

This important piece of legislation unfortunately has been implemented very slowly. It took 17 months after the passage of the North Korean Human Rights Act for 6 North Koreans to finally be granted asylum in the US.

Neighboring Nations

Asylum is a sensitive issue for Asian nations in close proximity to North Korea. The South Korean government has become increasingly interested in appeasing Kim Jong IL as opposed to helping the millions of people trapped under his regime.

According to Suzanne Scholte, President of the Defense Forum Foundation and Chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition, there reasons why South Korea has acquiesced to Kim Jong IL, these include fear of regime collapse and fear of the nuclear threat.

The most common fear is regime collapse and the ensuing chaos that would result when thousands of North Korean refugees stream over the border into South Korea. In the event of a regime collapse and, with virtually no infrastructure in North Korea, it is assumed everyone would try to move to the South. Scholte contends that the cost of containing and maintaining the Kim regime far outweigh the cost of regime collapse.

In an effort not to be a burden to South Korea, North Korean defectors are already planning how they can develop the North and take care of themselves. Many defectors are working as activists on behalf of North Koreans and have become productive members of society. As Scholte points out, in 1953 North Korea was the industrialized, economic power of Korea. In half a decade, South Korea is now listed as the world's 16th largest economy. In the event of a regime collapse, there is every reason to believe that North Korea would be able to develop and transform their economy as did their brothers in the South.

Please Pray

- That more North Korean refugees will be given asylum and the ability to live in freedom.
- That the international community will take action to pressure the UNHCR and involved nations to do their part in tackling this refugee crisis.
- That China will recognize their duty as a signatory of the UN protocol and grant the UNHCR, humanitarian organizations, and the U.S. and South Korea access to these refugees so they can be resettled in a safe location.

- That China will break any ties with the North Korean government and no longer operate in compliance with the regime's wishes for the repatriation of all defectors.
- That other surrounding Asian governments will cooperate in the efforts to provide safety and refuge for the North Korean refugees.
- That the U.S. government in particular will uphold their commitment to grant asylum to more North Korean refugees.
- That the U.S. government will also fully fund the North Korea Human Rights Act.
- That U.S. embassy employees will have compassion and be willing to help the refugees.
- For the willingness of South Korea to harbor and provide refuge for North Koreans until North Korea can be rebuilt and restored.
- For the governments of other nations to rise up and offer asylum to these refugees.
- For wisdom for the North Korean defectors in planning for the future of North Korea.
- That in the meantime, the North Korean refugees will be able to live and function in South Korea without being or feeling like a burden to society.
- For a united vision of both North and South Koreans to begin the long journey of hope for future unification.
- For freedom, safety and a place to call home for all Koreans.

"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." -Deuteronomy 10:18-19