

Exploitation of North Korean overseas workers in Poland, an issue raised at the OSCE in Warsaw

Statement presented by Willy Fautré, director of HRWF, at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on 22 September in Warsaw

HRWF (22.09.2016) - "In 2014, a welder at a Polish shipyard died in a horrible accident. According to the Polish Labour Inspectorate, the safety measures in place were not sufficient to provide even a minimum of safety to the welder. He was wearing flammable clothing provided to him by Armex, the company that employed him. Armex is a Polish company that is tied into a complex structure of companies that are co-owned by Polish and North Koreans representing their government and provide Polish companies with North Korean cheap labourers. The welder who died was a North Korean national, working 12-hour workdays (excluding overtime), 6 days per week. Not allowed to go anywhere in Poland except for work and home, not receiving proper compensation for his work (just his living expenses), forced to participate in ideological sessions worshipping an absolute god-like leader in his spare time, not having received a labour contract, and not in possession of his own passport, Chŏn Kyongsu was a victim of forced labour. A special kind of forced labour at that, one that is ideologically enforced and shaped, exported across borders and instigated and executed by the state." This is an excerpt from the 115-page report of the Leiden Asia Centre entitled "North Korean Forced Labour in the EU: the Polish Case." (<http://bit.ly/1pAcuz6>)

Over the last couple of years, the amount of work permits issued to North Korean workers in the EU has increased to around 500 per year with the amount accumulating to a total of 2783 work permits granted between 2008 and 2015.

Notable shipbuilding companies linked to North Korean workers are Crist S.A. and Nauta. S.A. Crist has worked on vessels for European companies located in Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, UK amongst others, and additionally for Norway, Cameroon and other non-EU countries. Nauta also works on NATO military vessels and is NATO certified, which may pose some global security and intelligence concerns.

Exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland

North Koreans that are sent to Polish shipyards and other worksites as forced laborers are subject, by their own political regime, to various forms of exploitation with the passive approval of the Polish authorities. Examples of unlawful exploitation of these workers include:

- Work hours ranging between 12 and 16 hours a day, with only one or two days of rest a month;
- An average monthly wage of \$120-150 per month, which is only 10-20% of their actual labor value in the contracts. As they are not allowed to have a bank account or to receive this money in cash, they are given a small stipend for personal use and will only collect their accumulated wages upon return to North Korea;
- Upon arrival in Poland, workers' passports and visas are confiscated by a North Korean so-called 'supervisor';
- While in Poland, North Korean workers are denied freedom of movement. Every day they are transferred to and from their worksite and dormitories by bus, and are under constant surveillance by North Korean security agents; they may not have any contact with the local population, and are separated from non-North Korean workers in their workplaces.

The Polish authorities are fully aware of this situation and yet these systematic violations of the ILO standards have not been addressed by a revision of their policies or sanctions against the actors involved in the exploitation of these workers.

A number of Polish companies have been identified as employing North Korean laborers and subjecting them to these improper work conditions:

- Alson Sp. Z.o.o.
- Aramex Elektro Sp. Z.o.o.52
- Aramex Sp. Z.o.o.
- Borgwarner Poland Sp. Z.o.o.
- Fabryka Mebli „Rys’ Sp. Z.o.o.
- FLAIR POLAND Sp. Z o.o.
- Fms Kielce Sp. Z o.o. Mielec
- Fms Kielce Sp. Z.o.o. Ceramika Harasiuki – Harasiuki
- HSBC Service Delivery (Polska) Sp. Z.o.o.
- JP Construct Sp. Z.o.o.
- K&K Select Sp. Z.o.o.
- K&K Select Aviation Sp. Z.o.o.
- K&K Selekt Itd. - Foreigners Recruitment
- Kobylnica
- Medif Prywatna Kasa Chorych Sa
- Monolit Sp. Z.o.o.
- Przedsiębiorstwo Produkcyjno – Handlowe „Postęp’ S.A.
- Przedsiębiorstwo Usługowo – Handlowe Modern – Bud Sp. Z.o.o. Gospodarstwo Rolne Tomasz Kociszewski
- Puckie Centrum Medyczne Sp. Z.o.o. Sp. Komandytowa Zs. W Pucku,
- Redshield Sp. Z.o.o.
- Stalbud – Budownictwo Sp. Z.o.o.
- Stalbud – Konstrukcje Sp. Z.o.o.
- Uniwersytet Gdański (Gdańsk),
- Wonye Sp. Z.o.o.

Three North Korean state companies have provided Polish companies with North Korean workers:

- Korea Cholsan General Corporation
- Korea Rungrado General Trading Corporation
- Korea South – South Cooperation Corporation

An exceptional 32-minute investigation video report made by Polish journalists about the exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland is available online at the following web addresses:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNVCdL908ko> (Sub-titles in English and French)

<http://www.vice.com/nl/video/cash-for-kim-de-noord-koreaanse-dwanganbeiders-die-zich-doodwerken-in-polen-293> (German)

More reports about North Korea’s involvement can be found at the following web address: <http://www.vice.com/nl/tag/Noord-Korea> (Dutch)