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Launch event for "An unmet need: a proposal for the BBC to broadcast a World Service in the Korean language"

European Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea (15.12.2013) - The British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service can truly be termed a global institution. Broadcasting since 1932, today the World Service reaches 192 million listeners and crosses countless borders, cultures and conflicts. A commitment to impartial reporting grants the World Service a reputation for integrity amongst its global audience and continues to set the BBC and its reporters firmly against censorship and political prejudice across the world.

In the face of funding cuts to many BBC services, the importance of the World Service to those beyond Britain's shores should not be overlooked. Many forget that for countless peoples, the BBC offers the only voice of impartiality and a vital connection to the outside world. For this reason, the very existence of the World Service actively stands for humanity, freedom of expression and a global voice in regions rife with repression.

In a stark contrast stands the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Preventing its citizens from accessing all forms of foreign media, Reporters Without Borders has continually ranked the DPRK as one of the world's most restrictive countries for freedom of the press. Holding a monopoly on the broadcasting of all domestic media, those accessing foreign broadcasts risk being interned at one of the state's many prison camps. Though many in the DPRK are increasingly willing to compromise their safety to seek information from the outside world, a toxic mix of official propaganda, whispered rumours and broken information can only offer mere glimpses beyond the country's borders.

In recent years the DPRK government has increased its efforts to stem an inflow of information into the country that has ridden the global tide of new media technologies. Illegal mobile phones, USB sticks, televisions and DVDs have all found their way to the DPRK. The technology most capable of reaching the North Korean people, however, remains one of the oldest: the radio.

In light of impending decisions on the future of the World Service, the European Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea is delighted to announce the launch of "An Unmet Need: a proposal for the BBC to broadcast a World Service in the Korean language," a policy paper strongly outlining the case for a BBC Korean-language service. We will be joined by Fiona Bruce MP and Lord Alton.

EAHRNK Policy Paper Launch

Host: All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea

Venue: Committee Room 17, Houses of Parliament, London

Date and time: 18th of December, 8.30am – 9.30am

To register for the event, email events@eahrnk.org

Kim Jong-un executes uncle: Jang Song-thaek had been North Korea's No. 2

The execution of leader Kim Jong-un's uncle marks the unprecedented fall from grace of one of the most powerful figures in North Korea and the most serious political upheaval in the country in decades

Daily Telegraph (13.12.2013) - Jang Song-thaek, a native of the far northeastern border city of Chongjin who hailed from humble roots but was sharp enough to gain entry to prestigious Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang, rose from municipal bureaucrat to vice chairman of the National Defense Commission and member of the Political Bureau - posts that put him second in power only to Kim.

A well-traveled diplomat with a network that spread to China, Jang was considered the chief architect of economic policy that focused on partnering with the neighbor and ally.

His ties to Kim were more than political: Jang was married to the leader's aunt, Kim Kyong-hui, and in late 2008, he was assumed to be serving in a regency role while the young heir, then in his late 20s, was being groomed to succeed father Kim Jong-il. Jang often accompanied Kim Jong-un on guidance trips, and stood at his elbow at public events.

Rumours of Jang's dismissal began surfacing in Seoul last week. On Sunday, he was fired from all posts at a special party meeting and dragged away by the arms by soldiers. Four days after his dramatic public arrest, Jang was tried for treason by a special military tribunal and executed on Thursday, state media reported. He was 67.

The list of crimes against Jang was long, with plotting to overthrow the leadership the most serious of the allegations. Jang confessed, according to state media.

For the outside world, the 2,700-word treatise ripping Jang's reputation to shreds provided an intriguing and revealing glimpse into the murky, feudalistic world of politics in the secretive country.

For North Koreans, the shocking public humiliation of a man seen as a father figure to Kim Jong Un was designed to send a clear message about the intolerance of opposition in a totalitarian state that demands absolute loyalty to the leader.

It was a humiliating end to a complicated career.

Jang started his career as instructor for the Pyongyang City Committee of the Workers' Party, and he rose post by post until reaching the top ranks.

He was purged and sent to a labour camp for two years in the mid-2000s, according to Kim Young-soo, a North Korea expert at Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea. That purge was widely seen as a move to clip his wings.

It was after Kim Jong-il's stroke in 2008 as the regime began grooming Kim Jong-un to succeed him that Jang began making a meteoric rise to the inner circle. That rise gained speed after Kim Jong-il's death from a heart attack in December 2011.

Jang was not a career military man but was made a four-star general, and often appeared at state events in a trim white general's uniform. He was appointed director of the Administration Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party, a position that gave him power over security agencies as well as the judiciary.

And as a standing member of the Political Bureau, he helped engineer a campaign to bring the once-powerful military into the party's fold.

Jang also played a key role in shaping economic policy in the impoverished country, particularly expanding joint ventures with foreign countries, particularly China. Under Kim, the regime has made improving the economy a main party objective, along with building nuclear weapons.

Jang recently added a new title to his portfolio: chairman of the State Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission, one of Kim Jong-un's pet projects. He last was seen publicly in early November meeting a sports delegation from Japan.

A shrewd-looking man who looked out on the world from tinted glasses, Jang had basked in his special status as the nation's No. 2 official. He displayed a noticeable insolence at public events where the rest of the top officials sat at attention, clapping with the kind of ennui only displayed by one other man: Kim Jong-un.

In a sharply worded character assassination, state media portrayed him as a power-hungry and ambitious challenger to the throne who resorted to nepotism and favoritism to build his "little kingdom" as he plotted a coup against his nephew.

In North Korea, opposition to the supreme leader is treated as a criminal, counterrevolutionary act.

State media accused Jang of destroying the economy for his personal benefit, blaming him for masterminding the 2009 currency revaluation that sparked rare protests in North Korea. He was held responsible for the shoddy quality of construction materials, charged with secretly trading in rare metals and was criticised for encouraging private enterprise.

He was described as a libertine and secret capitalist who distributed pornography and blew 4.6 million euros (\$6.3 million) on gambling, according to state media.

Some of the accusations are petty: reportedly rejecting factory workers' proposal to erect a mosaic of the two late leaders, ordered that a granite sculpture featuring Kim's signature be put in the shade, not in a central spot.

Jang's conviction was preceded by the reported executions last month of his two closest confidants. North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency confirmed one ally's purge on Wednesday, calling Ri Ryong Ha a "flatterer" and stooge who with Jang was building an anti-Kim faction within the party.

The purge of Jang's accused comrades will continue, state media said.

What Jang's execution means for his wife was unclear. Kim Kyong-hui plays a key role in a leadership structure that stakes its claim to legitimacy on blood relations to her father,

North Korea founder Kim Il-sung. Frail and said to be in bad health, Kim has not been seen publicly in footage and photos aired of this week's proceedings.

The Jangs, who met at university and married in 1972, have no surviving children, according to the South Korean government-run Information Center on North Korea. Their only child, a daughter, committed suicide in 2006 at age 29 while studying in Paris, according to South Korean media.

Jang's execution also calls the future careers of his relatives into question. A brother-in-law who is the ambassador to Cuba and his nephew, the ambassador to Malaysia, reportedly were recalled to Pyongyang, according to South Korean officials.

Another relative, the deputy tourism minister, cancelled a trip to attend a tourism conference in Taiwan this week, Taiwanese officials told the island's state news agency, CNA.

The execution of Kim Jong-Un's powerful uncle leaves China in a very delicate position

Jang's execution raises concern over future of NKorea's economic cooperation with ally China

Business Insider (13.12.2013) — The stunning execution of Kim Jong Un's powerful uncle strips China of its most important link to North Korea's leadership and deepens concerns over how the unruly neighbor will proceed on Beijing's key issues of nuclear disarmament and economic reform.

Facing heightened uncertainty, Beijing will likely avoid for now any response that might boost panic or paranoia in Pyongyang, where China is both valued and resented as a key backer of Kim's regime.

"It's like when you have a gas leak. You want to be very, very careful not to set off any sparks," said Jingdong Yuan, an expert on northeast Asian security at the University of Sydney.

At the same time, China is likely dusting off its contingency plans for instability or even a regime collapse that could see thousands of refugees swarming across its borders, put the North's nuclear facilities at risk, and prompt action by the U.S. and South Korean militaries, Yuan said.

"This is not a welcome development as far as China is concerned," said.

Long considered Kim's mentor and the country's No. 2, Jang Song Thaek formed a key conduit between Pyongyang and Beijing because of his association with the government of Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, along with his support for China-backed reforms to revive the North's moribund economy.

Jang met with top Chinese officials during their visits to Pyongyang, and in 2012, Jang traveled to China at the head of one of the largest North Korean delegations ever to visit the Chinese capital to discuss construction of special economic zones that Beijing hopes will ensure North Korea's stability.

His execution on a myriad of charges from treason to drug abuse further diminishes China's narrow influence on the government of the younger Kim. Despite being North

Korea's only significant ally and a crucial source of trade and aid, Beijing has been unsuccessful in persuading North Korea to rejoin six-nation nuclear disarmament talks, while its overwhelming desire for stability along its northeastern border prevents it from getting overly tough on its neighbor.

Jang's China contacts weren't explicitly mentioned in the official litany of crimes against him, although he was accused of underselling North Korean mineral resources for which China is virtually the sole customer. His China ties also were implicitly criticized via a reference to corruption related a 2011 project in conjunction with China at the Rason special economic zone.

Jang, North Korea's official media said, "made no scruple of committing such act of treachery in May last as selling off the land of the Rason economic and trade zone to a foreign country for a period of five decades under the pretext of paying those debts."

Jang's execution comes at delicate time in bilateral relations. While Kim's father made a number of visits to China, the new leader has yet to travel outside North Korea and has repeatedly defied Beijing's calls not to launch missiles and stage nuclear tests. That has in turn spurred Beijing to make unusually bold criticism and sign on to tightened U.N. Security Council sanctions, arousing an angry response from Pyongyang.

The chill in relations was somewhat relieved following the visit by a top North Korean general to Beijing this summer, but diplomats say China remains committed to working closely with the international community on enforcing sanctions and coaxing Pyongyang back to nuclear talks.

Still, Jang's execution isn't expected to bring major, immediate changes in a relationship that has been remarkably consistent over the many decades since China sent troops to save the North Korean regime from extinction in the 1950-53 Korean War.

Wang Junsheng, a North Korea watcher at the government's Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said relations might even benefit since the move leaves Kim in a stronger position than ever to guide North Korea's ties Beijing, the strengthening of which benefits both sides.

"Kim has now finished consolidating his power and doesn't need to take drastic change in his foreign policy. Jang was merely a person who offered advice and implemented policy," Wang said.

China's response to Jang's dramatic purging has been extremely low-key, emphasizing that the issue is North Korea's internal affair and expressing its hopes for stability and economic development. Along with stifling panic, Beijing may be hoping that its non-intervention will spare some of Jang's pro-China associates from being targeted for removal under the North's policy of collective punishment.

As with South Korea, the U.S. and other interested parties, Beijing is struggling to analyze the current state of affairs in Pyongyang and ascertain Kim's positions on key topics.

While Kim has enunciated a policy of jointly pursuing nuclear weapons and development, it isn't clear whether he views economic reforms as strengthening his rule or undermining it by inviting unwelcome comparisons with foreign economies and by introducing foreign concepts and practices, said Shi Yuanhua, director of the Center for Korean Studies at the Fudan University.

"North Korea couldn't live without China, but cooperation in developing the special economic zones may be affected to some extent," Shi said.

Overall, Kim's attitude toward economic reform in cooperation with China remains a mixed bag, said Fang Xiuyu, a North Korea expert at Shanghai's Fudan University.

Even as Pyongyang was announcing Jang's purging, North Korean and Chinese representatives were signing contracts on cross-border high-speed rail and highway connections, Fang pointed out.

"I don't think North Korea's economic relations with China will be affected because of this particular incident, but all we can really do for now is speculate," she said.

US tourist held in North Korea 'was part of covert unit during Korean War'

Merrill Newman was part of group that organised clandestine operations during Korean War, according to North Korea's state media

The Telegraph (04.12.2013) - A retired US serviceman detained for six weeks in [North Korea](#) served in a special unit that ran anti-communist partisan units behind enemy lines during the Korean War.

Merrill Newman, 85, from Palo Alto in California, was escorted off an Air Koryo flight on Oct. 26 shortly after he was scheduled to fly to Beijing at the end of a guided tour.

North Korea has released a video of Mr Newman reading a confession and issuing an apology for his actions whilst serving in the US Army's "White Tigers" unit during the conflict.

The state-run KCNA news agency reported that Mr Newman organised clandestine operations and confessed to being "guilty of a long list of indelible crimes against the DPRK government and Korean people."

"He is a criminal as he masterminded espionage and subversive activities against the DPRK and in this course he was involved in killings of service personnel of the Korean People's Army and innocent civilians," the report added.

After leaving Pyongyang, Mr Newman was due to travel on to South Korea, where he was to meet veterans of the partisan groups that he set up, known as Kuwol. The units are lionised in the South for the losses they inflicted on the North Korean and Chinese forces during the three-year conflict, which ended in 1953.

A group of 30 former guerrillas was waiting to meet Mr Newman at Incheon Airport, outside Seoul, on October 27, according to The Associated Press.

"Why did he go to North Korea?" asked Park Boo Seo, a former member of the unit. "The North Koreans still gnash their teeth at the Kuwol unit."

Other members of the unit remember Mr. Newman as a slender lieutenant who provided them with rice, clothing and weapons during the latter stages of the war, but largely left the fighting to the partisans.

Mr Newman's service record show he attended officer candidate school and rose rapidly after he had been deployed to Korea from platoon leader to company commander. The

records show he completed an infiltration training course and studied at a military intelligence school.

Questions have been asked as to why Mr Newman was singled out to be arrested just minutes before his flight was to depart, with some suggesting that he made the mistake of getting into a debate with his minders about the war.

The US government and Mr Newman's have appealed to the North Korean authorities for information about the charges he faces and to ensure that he receives the medication he regularly takes for a heart complaint. His family has declined to comment on his military service.

The Swedish ambassador has been able to meet Mr Newman at a hotel in Pyongyang, according to his family, and he appears to be in good health and undergoes regular health checks.

Kim's uncle said unharmed in Pyongyang purge amid leadership crisis

Japan Times (04.12.2013) - Jang Song Thaek, the uncle and de facto deputy of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, is safe even as it appears he has been removed from his post, a South Korean minister said.

Jang, a vice chairman of the National Defense Commission led by Kim, remains physically unharmed, Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae told a parliamentary hearing Wednesday in Seoul, local television networks reported. The Unification Ministry later confirmed the remarks.

"Purges are continuing in North Korea," Ryoo told lawmakers, without saying how he obtained the information.

The removal of Jang, which would be the highest-level dismissal since Kim took power two years ago, may indicate that Kim is still trying to solidify his grip on power by dismissing officials who gained prominence under his late father, Kim Jong Il. In October, Kim replaced his chief of general staff for a third time since taking over the North's 1.2 million-strong army after his father died of a heart attack in 2011.

Jang hasn't been seen since the public execution of two of his confidants last month, South Korea opposition lawmaker Jung Cheong Rae said by phone Tuesday, citing the South's National Intelligence Service. Ruling party lawmaker Cho Won-jin said at a televised briefing that the purge followed a corruption investigation. Both Jung and Cho serve on South Korea's parliament intelligence committee. The NIS declined comment on Jang when a call was made to its main phone number Tuesday.

"This could be a sign there's a problem with Kim Jong Un's grip on power," Ahn Chan-il, who heads the World Institute for North Korea Studies in Seoul, said by phone. "I suspect there is a stability issue in the regime."

Jang, who married Kim Jong Un's aunt, Kim Kyong Hui, in 1972, was named to the post in June 2010 by Kim Jong Il.

North Korea is "conducting follow-up measures" against organizations affiliated with Jang, lawmaker Cho said. The government is mounting a campaign for "absolute loyalty" to Kim, he said.

Some defense-related stocks gained Wednesday in Seoul. Speco Co., a maker of fin stabilizers and water jets, gained 5.7 percent, the biggest rise since Oct. 4. VICTEK Co., a manufacturer of electronic warfare equipment, rose 2.2 percent. Armored vehicle maker Firstec Co. fell 0.3 percent after rising as much as 5.9 percent earlier in the day.

During Kim Jong Il's rule, the National Defense Commission was regarded as North Korea's most powerful institution, and remains more important than both the nation's defense agency and the ruling Korean Workers' Party. Jang walked directly behind Kim Jong Un at his father's funeral.

"Kim is warning the public with the executions, and it can only mean he's feeling insecure about his power," said Lee Ji-sue, a professor of North Korean studies at Myongji University in Seoul. "Kim just didn't have enough time to build his own power base before his father died, and the economic situation right now just doesn't help."

Jang, one of the country's leading economic policymakers who visited China in August last year, was reported by South Korean newspapers to have been demoted in 2004 for cultivating too much influence. He was brought back to power in 2006 to head the Workers' Party administrative department, overseeing the intelligence agency and other military institutions.

The disappearance of a senior official instrumental to Kim Jong Un's succession isn't unprecedented. In 2012, North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said that Ri Yong Ho, the general staff chief, had been removed from all posts, while all traces of his presence were eliminated from official footage and photos. KCNA gave no clear reason for the decision.

KCNA last reported on Jang in early November.

A corruption investigation into Jang's allies may have been led by Choe Ryong Hae, North Korea's top political military officer, as a result of a power struggle, and may actually show Kim's strength, Cheong Seong-chang, a researcher at the Seongnam-based Sejong Institute, said in an email.

"The executions and Jang's removal from posts show Kim Jong Un's power is very solid at the moment," Cheong said. "I expect the race for loyalty will heat up in the ruling circle in the future."

North Korea's relations with the outside world have dimmed under Kim, as the country tested its third atomic device in February and threatened nuclear strikes against South Korea and the U.S. On Nov. 6, North Korea rejected the idea of a summit after South Korean President Park Geun-hye said she was willing to meet Kim if it led to concrete results.

The two Koreas remain technically in conflict after the 1950-53 Korean War ended without a formal peace treaty.

"Instability with Kim's grip on power will continue, and he may try to ride it out by creating a military crisis with the outside world," Myongji University's Lee said. "With no aid and no dialogue, the crisis for the ruling class continues to deepen."

North Korea gives more trade autonomy to firms

Yonhap (02.12.2013) -North Korea has allowed greater leeway for its exporters to boost trade, a report showed on Dec. 1, another sign that the socialist country may be loosening its tight grip on its centralized planned economy.

"Recently, we've given (trade firms) authority to boost their trade, and allowed them to set up their bases in major production points for exports," said Pak Eung-sik, who leads the (North) Korean International Exhibition Corp.

His company is in charge of organizing international trade fairs and clinching trade contracts with foreign companies.

He made the comments in his interview with an association of pro-Pyongyang Korean-Japanese residents. The article was published on the association's monthly magazine.

There have been signs that the socialist country has taken steps toward freer trade by introducing the so-called independent profit system in its major factories and firms.

"We've also introduced the system of producing goods for overseas shipping in a planned fashion," he said, calling the move "favorable for credit guarantees."

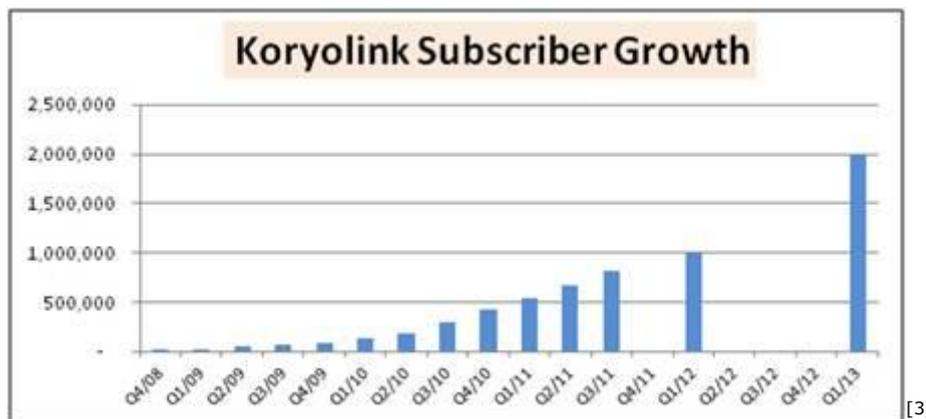
As a way to attract overseas investment, the socialist country is taking measures to relax regulations. It is building major tourism and entertainment facilities, including hotels, golf courses and horse-racing stadiums, he added.

Such a push is widely deemed in line with its leader Kim Jong-un's policy platform of putting a greater focus on its economy, which is critical for achieving sustainable growth so as to guarantee the survival of the regime.

As part of those efforts, Pyongyang has been rushing to set up special economic zones all across the country, eased relevant regulations to attract foreign investors and given greater leeway to managers of factories and cooperative farms to boost production.

A closer look at the 'Explosion of Cell Phone Subscribers' in North Korea

North 38 (26.11.2013) - The North Korean mobile telecommunications market has seen dramatic subscriber growth over the past five years contrary to initial speculations that mobile service would be limited to the elite. The 3G service, Koryolink, was launched in December 2008 by CHEO Technology JV Company, a joint venture between the Egyptian telecommunications firm Orascom (75 percent) and the North Korean Korea Post and Telecommunications Corporation (25 percent). In just over three years, Koryolink reached one million subscribers by February 2012, and then doubled that rate in 15 months, reaching two million subscribers in May 2013.[\[1\]](#)^[1] As of the end of the third quarter of 2011, Koryolink's network consisted of 453 base stations covering the capital, Pyongyang, as well as 14 main cities and 86 smaller cities.[\[2\]](#)^[2]



[3]

Source: Orascom Telecom, 2008~2011 Earnings Release; OTMT Press Releases, February 2, 2012 & May 28, 2013.

While statistics are scarce and difficult to verify, anecdotal evidence clearly indicates that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of cell phone users in North Korea. Many foreign visitors have reported seeing ordinary people, including teenagers and construction workers, using cell phones on the streets not only in Pyongyang, but in other major cities as well. The gadgets seem to have become a common sight, at least in major cities.

Who are the users?

An extremely restrictive regime was adopted when Koryolink launched 3G service in late 2008. In the beginning, according to a former Korean Workers' Party official from Pyongyang, the service was available only to senior officials at security agencies and their families, and officially recognized traders involved in the business of earning hard currency, while Party cadres and workers at military factories were excluded from this service for security reasons. Even in the first one or two years after the launch, only powerful people or those who were rich enough to bribe distributors could acquire handsets due to limited supply.

As the government adopted a more permissive regime, ownership of cell phones is now determined by one's financial capacity unless the applicant has serious security clearance problems. Of course, senior Party, government, and military officials and wealthy traders were the initial customer groups. These officials are able to accumulate wealth by accepting bribes or engaging in business through their public offices. It is no wonder that "Pyongyang's 'golden couples' consist of a government-official husband and an entrepreneur wife." [3] ^[5]

However, the rise of informal markets has contributed to the development of a proto-middle class or the new rich who can now also afford cell phones. [4] ^[6] For the new rich, cell phones are not only a symbol of wealth but also a means of survival. They provide traders with greater mobility and efficient ways to exchange market information, including information on prices and exchange rates. The wholesale and retail traders at the informal markets are now able to collect market information at an unprecedented speed and respond to changing market conditions promptly. Buyers and sellers often complete their bargaining over the phone even before the goods are taken to market. Cell phones have become popular not only in major cities but also in some towns and villages where residents are actively involved in trade with partners in the bigger cities. For example, residents of rural areas where gold mining or farm produce trade are booming can no longer imagine conducting businesses without cell phones.

Another popular financial source for obtaining cell phones is the remittances from defectors (mostly from those settled in South Korea) to their families left in North Korea. The annual amount of remittances is estimated at around US\$ 10 million.^[5]^[7] Incoming funds from South Korea have become so significant that they have been dubbed the “Mount Halla Stream,” named after the tallest mountain in South Korea.

Prestige is another important driver for the popularity of cell phones among North Koreans. A man from Chongjin who defected in December 2012 said that cell phones had become so popular that a young man without a cell phone was not treated well and could not even find a girlfriend. “Considering the high prices of handsets, it is obvious that only those who ‘regularly eat meat’ can afford to buy one,” he said. Even those without significant income are selling their assets or hard-earned crops to buy the handsets for themselves to show off their ‘wealth’ or for their demanding children who also want to bond with their cell-phone-using friends. As in other countries, cell phones have become status symbols, signs of prosperity, and one of the most noticeable examples of conspicuous consumption in North Korea.

Initially, potential buyers of cell phones must get approval from the State Security Department or the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of People’s Security by explaining the purpose and financial source of their purchase. After that, applicants must wait for up to one month until the application is processed. However, for those who want to own a cell phone without having to go through this lengthy, bothersome application process, they can register with fake names for extra fees. Intermediaries loitering around the Communications Technology Management Office or its branches can shorten the processing period down to one or two days. They register tens of phones in bogus names before selling them at higher prices than what the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications offers. Although illegal, the practice has become increasingly common as the demand for cell phones has risen quickly.

The authorities have responded to these widespread illegal phones by removing the long-winded, restrictive regulations, at least in the border cities with China. According to defectors who continue to contact their relatives in Chongjin and Hyesan, since early 2012, applicants can now obtain both cell phones and phone numbers on the same day they register with the Communications Technology Management Office. Another defector who maintains contacts with his sources in North Korea also reported the same deregulations in Sinuiju, Hyesan, Chongjin, and even Pyongyang. Pre-approvals from the security agencies are no longer required. These days, the office passes on all the information after the sale to the security agencies for the security check.

Actual number of users

Although there are a growing number of testimonies by defectors and foreign visitors about the boom in cell phone use in North Korea, the two million subscribers that Koryolink has allegedly reached is still controversial among experts. Some argue that two million is not a realistic number considering North Korea’s demographics—a population of 24 million people. There are at least one million soldiers^[6]^[9] who are not allowed to use cell phones for security reasons and three million children under 10 years old^[7]^[10] who may not be old enough to legitimately use cell phones. If this two-million figure is correct, Orascom is essentially reporting that one out of ten North Koreans are using cell phones. Skeptical experts point out that this simply does not make sense for a country where per capita GDP is as low as US\$ 1,800.^[8]^[11]

Some North Korea economy experts agree with the skeptics, attributing the potentially overstated users to Koryolink’s complicated rate plans. Experts who have sources in North Korea argue that a growing number of heavy users, such as traders, have started to use more than one phone to save money. Subscribers get 200 ‘free’ minutes per

month for a basic quarterly service charge of around 3,000 won (less than 40 cents at black market exchange rates^[9] ^[12]). After using up those minutes, they have to purchase 'top-up cards' in foreign currency that cost as high as 10 to 20 times more than the basic charge. Some people have determined that using more than one phone, thereby getting additional blocks of 200 minutes free, is more economical than using only one phone and paying for a multiple top-up cards. Of course, this requires extra handsets but the extra upfront expenditures can be recovered as this practice continues.

There may also be a significant number of cell phones distributed by the Party, government and military organs for official use. Heung Kwang Kim, Executive Director of North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity and a former professor at Hamheung Computer Technology University in North Korea, argued that up to one quarter of registered cell phones were for official use for the Central Party, state administrative agencies, state agencies with special missions, the police, the military, courts and so forth.^[10] ^[13] He said the call time was very limited for these phones. A defector who worked for a trading company in Musan until early 2011 said some trading companies, including Green Pine Association Corporation or Chongsong Yonhap which is on the UN blacklist, purchased cell phones with their own official funds and provided them to their employees on business trips to Pyongyang and Chongjin. A former Central Party official from Pyongyang said senior Party officials were provided with cell phones for official use. These testimonies suggest that a certain number of Koryolink customers would use multiple cell phones for private and official uses.

North Korea experts note that high-ranking officials rarely use their cell phones for fear of being eavesdropped on by foreign intelligence agencies. One North Korea IT specialist said that there were many inactive cell phone numbers presumably allocated to the power elite in North Korea. For example, only 800,000 numbers showed active traffic in February 2012 when the Koryolink subscribers rose to one million. This specialist suspected that part of the 200,000 inactive numbers was reserved for fast-track communication lines going directly to the leadership.^[11] ^[14]

Growth potential

Some experts expect the number of subscribers could reach as many as 5 million, a penetration of 20 percent, assuming every household in North Korea buys at least one cell phone. This rosy outlook depends on how quickly the Koryolink service will be rolled out to the lower income segments, particularly the rural poor. The biggest challenge for Koryolink in expanding its subscriber base seems to be the exorbitant costs of handsets, ranging from US\$ 150~700. Although some lower income people manage to find ways to obtain the handsets for conspicuous consumption, this may not be a sustainable trend unless the North Korean government, the exclusive seller of handsets, changes its pricing policy to accommodate more buyers. In addition, more affordable rate plans, especially for the top-up cards, would encourage potential users to subscribe to the service.

The economy of small cities is also an important factor for the Koryolink subscribership. Some experts estimate that the maximum number of subscribers in Pyongyang, which has a population around 2 million people, is around 1.5 million. This estimate assumes that there are two users per household and that Pyongyang is most likely to be approaching its full subscribership. Furthermore, there are only four major cities with populations greater than 500,000 in North Korea: Pyongyang, Hamheung, Chongjin, and Nampo.^[12] ^[15] Pointing to these market restraints, some experts predict that subscriptions will stagnate after hitting 3 million. Therefore, sustainable subscriber growth should be supported by small cities and rural areas. This, in turn, depends on the pace and scale of development of the local economies, including the informal markets.

Conclusion

One should be careful not to jump to a conclusion that North Korea is entering 'mobile telecommunications revolution.' North Koreans are still largely denied internet access, and international calls are blocked. Prohibitive top-up rates have made general users reserve their calls for important messages or emergencies. New digital social networking remains an unreachable luxury for the general population and traditional self-censorship prevents politically sensitive conversations on the phone. The government conducts tight surveillance of phone calls and text messages and frequently censors 'politically inappropriate' content on them such as South Korean songs and dramas.

However, there are still loopholes that the government cannot perfectly close. For example, a primitive but creative way to make 'international' calls supported by illegal Chinese cell phones is in the making, mainly employed now for remittances from defectors in South Korea to their families left in North Korea. However, if brokers can find more profit opportunities, they could surely figure out safer and more creative ways to circumvent technical barriers and the monitoring system. A defector in Seoul has already overcome that technical barrier by connecting to foreign phones with SIM cards bought in Pyongyang. The fact that millions of handheld cameras and digital voice recorders are being circulated should be source of anxiety for the regime. Despite tightly controlled and monitored, the Koryolink network could still potentially widen the loopholes of information flow to and from the outside world.

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This article is based on research done for a forthcoming comprehensive report on North Korea's cell phone usage written by Yonho Kim and co-sponsored by the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Voice of America. The full report will cover trends, the socio-economic impact, regime responses, and Orascom's future in the North Korean telecommunications market. The full report will be released in January 2014.

[1]^[16] Earnings Releases 2008~2011 by Orascom Telecom; Orascom Telecom Media & Tech Holding (OTMT), "Koryolink Reaches Two Million Subscribers," Press release, May 28, 2013. No more information on Koryolink's operational performances, except for a brief press release and media interviews, is publically available after Koryolink ownership was transferred from Orascom Telecom to Orascom Telecom Media and Technology Holding (OTMT) in 2011.

[2]^[17] Orascom Telecom Holding, *Earnings Release Third Quarter 2011*, November 14, 2011. Even though the network covers only 14% of the territory, 94% of the population of North Korea can be served by the established Koryolink network because the rest of the country is mostly mountainous and sparsely populated.

[3]^[18] "Also available to earthlings," *The Economist*, February 11, 2012.

[4]^[19] For the informal economic activities and the new rich in North Korea, see Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford University Press 2013) pp. 82-93 and pp. 91-2.

[5]^[20] "Concern as remittances to N. Korea grow," *Chosun Ilbo*, February 7, 2011.

[6]^[21] South Korean Defense Ministry, *Defense White Paper 2012*, December 2012.

[7] ^[22] Central Bureau of Statistics of North Korea, *DPR Korea 2008 Population Census National Report*, 2009.

[8] ^[23] 2011 estimate. CIA, *World Fact Book*. Last updated August 22, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html> ^[24].

[9] ^[25] According to *Daily NK*, black market exchange rates in Pyongyang, Sinuiju, and Hyesan steadily rose until reaching \$1=8,000 won in late 2012 and have stayed at the level since then. See North Korean Market Trends, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/market.php> ^[26].

[10] ^[27] Interviewed by author in Seoul, South Korea, in July 2013.

[11] ^[28] For the reporting system dedicated to Kim Jong Il, see Ken E. Gause, *Coercion, Control, Surveillance, and Punishment: An Examination of the North Korean Police State*, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, July 19, 2012.

[12] ^[29] "Nampo is the most densely populated city in North Korea" in Korean, VOA, May 21, 2012, <http://www.voakorea.com/content/dprk-cities-demography-152323315/1367245.html> ^[30].

Tourism in North Korea: the secret state is opening up

I've been to North Korea many times. A new ski resort is the latest sign of a shift in the regime's mentality towards foreigners

The Guardian (22.10.2013) - All the hoo-ha that's surrounded the recent [opening of North Korea's ski resort](#), framed as it's been by the western press as the answer to chubby Kim Jong Un's wont to indulge his Swiss ways, has overlooked the fact that every dollar spent on tourism is a dollar not spent on centrifuges or Mercedes.

I've been to [North Korea](#) many times since 2002, when I first went to research for a guidebook on the land, and genuinely, a tourist ski resort is really quite a canny investment. Dollar for dollar it has the potential for a far quicker and greater return than investing, for example, in manufacturing industry, which depends on regular supplies of power, raw materials, detailed and up-to-date market data and actual access to international markets, none of which the North has. For a ski resort, the hill's free, the snow's free, it's just up to the tourists to decide to come.

Building a tourist industry provides jobs for locals who'd otherwise be working in bomb factories, if they had work at all. It diversifies the North Korean economy away from weapons' exports. It provides and demands skills ranging from designing and building quality accommodation, to the people skills required in servicing hotels guests, and brings in investment in infrastructure, roads, railways, airports, health facilities and food supply chains that ever more areas will seek to benefit from as they open up to visitors.

All in, tourist dollars help to expand the economy and create dependents at every level on tourist dollars, which creates a great incentive not to go around starting wars. That's one reason South Korea built the large industrial zone near Kaesong city in North Korea, a large development right on the flashpoint DMZ. The North closed the zone during April's stand-off – but, note, they didn't smash it up, and it's [now reopened](#). The world's press did much to exaggerate the state of tensions during the stand-off, but tourism to North Korea continued, and British-run tour firm [Koryo Tours](#) was, for the very first time, opening up the formerly closed border city of Sinuiju.

Tourism also brings foreign currency into the North, which might be spent on something nefarious or may be used to import foodstuffs that international donors [have refused to give since April's stand-off](#).

The reality is the ski resort is the latest small, but tangible shift in the mindset of those running the state. A friend of mine who specialises in tours of North Korea was just this year sent to the east coast port of Wonsan to check out buildings that formerly housed former Korean People's Army officers but are now being converted to civilian use as hotels. If the Korean People's Army is getting out of goose-stepping and into tourism, surely that's a good thing.

Of course, tourism will only profit the army as it does the state overall, and they may spend any profits on sinister things. But in this multi-connected world, you can't get out of bed without money being taxed or profited into the hands of bad people. Tax is the state's racket, but it's only when we talk about North Korea that tourism is framed by what the government there does – no-one complains that the billions spent on touring the US helps fund drone strikes on Pakistani children, for example, or the British government spends billions on [Trident nuclear submarines](#) while demand at food banks continues to rise.

I'm no supporter of the regime that runs North Korea. The regime spends an inordinate amount of energy trying to convince its people that we westerners are terrible savages. But the regime isn't going anywhere. It's survived for over 60 years on a war footing with the South and the US (which almost wiped the North off the map during the Korean War); it's survived famine and total economic and diplomatic isolation. My tourist dollars contribute as much to propping up the regime, funding its gulags or its nuclear program, as they did 20 years ago when there were no tourists nor nukes.

But most importantly, I don't see why anyone should dictate to me where I can go, be it the regime or outsiders, nor who I'll meet in North Korea, what opportunities in engagement that come from that and why the local people should be denied the livelihoods and learning of skills and languages.

Additional tourism in North Korea will help locals see that outsiders aren't all awful people, and outsiders to see that the North Koreans are not the soulless automatons or brainwashed actors terrified of meeting foreigners that the western press loves to portray them as. They're real people, who might have other concerns than to immediately give westerners the attention they think they deserve, but if they catch your smile they'll wave back with genuine warmth, if not actually talk to you (assuming they are confident in English, more than I am in Korean). This is increasingly true, in ever more places. Let's go meet them.

Escaping North Korea: the long road to freedom

De Spiegel (17.10.2013) - Kim met another defector, Jang Jin Sung, after he came to South Korea. Jang, 41, is old enough to be Kim's son. He has a round face and a gentle and amiable demeanor. He used to work for the North Korean intelligence service and in propaganda, and his specialty was psychological warfare. He wrote tributes to the country's leader at the time, but he defected in 2004.

Jang is very familiar with the inner circle surrounding dictator Kim Jong Un. He grew up in the most privileged class and still has North Korean contacts who can -- and do -- feed him details about the party and the regime.

Through his English-language website, New Focus International, Jang now publishes information about the ruling elite on a daily basis. For instance, he printed a list of regime figures who have defected, and he also wrote that "Respected Leader" Kim Jong Un had given copies of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" to a small group of confidants. Jang recently posted a satellite photo of the villa in which King Jong Un's powerful aunt lives, and he announced his intention to compile an online album of the houses of the powerful in North Korea.

Pyongyang's KCNA state news agency refers to Jang as a "bastard" and regularly threatens him with "extermination." As a precaution, the South Korean government has assigned him a 24-hour security detail.

From Officer to Prisoner to Honoree

It is 4 p.m. Using his mobile phone, Kim Yong Hwa transfers the money for the traffickers in China. The seven defectors are to be taken to one of the safe houses that Kim's organization, the North Korea Refugees Human Rights Association, has set up in China. From there, helpers will smuggle them to Vietnam or Laos. After that, they will be taken to Thailand, where they are finally safe, because Thailand does not extradite defectors to North Korea.

Kim bolts the two locks to his office, walks down the street and sits down in a small restaurant, where he eats a meal of pork simmered over a small charcoal grill and pickled greens. He proceeds to tell his own story.

On July 13, 1988, a supply train carrying Russian tank parts derailed in South Hamgyong Province. Kim, who was responsible for the train's security, was then accused of negligence for not having prevented the accident.

He faced the threat of public execution and the disgrace of his family. Kim was 35, married and had three children. He says he only had two options: to commit suicide or defect.

At 10 p.m. one evening, Kim waded through the river to the Chinese side, carrying a pistol and his party membership card in a backpack.

He walked all the way to Vietnam, where he was thrown into prison. He managed to escape and return to China, and from there he took a boat to South Korea, where he was suspected of being a spy, imprisoned and allegedly tortured. He shows scars on his head and feet that he says came from that period.

After three years, Kim escaped and found refuge in a church. To this day, the church is the only organization he trusts. The large Myungsung Presbyterian Church in Seoul is also the biggest donor to his organization.

Kim left South Korea and went to Japan, where he was again suspected of being an agent and sent to prison. In prison, he wrote a book about his story. Human rights groups fought on his behalf, and a minister eventually took up his cause and helped Kim gain recognition as a refugee in South Korea.

Kim was awarded South Korean citizenship in Seoul in 2002, and on Aug. 15 of this year, South Korean President Park Geun-hye invited him, as the guest of honor, to a state reception to mark the anniversary of Korean liberation from the Japanese.

Bittersweet Revenge

Kim sits cross-legged as he eats his meal. He has already emptied the third bottle of Soju, an alcohol beverage stronger than wine made from rice or potatoes. He recounts a joke he says North Korean refugees make among themselves: When do you know when you have truly arrived in Seoul? Answer: The first time you have a nightmare that takes place in South Korea. Kim laughs.

Not many North Koreans survive the escape from Kim Jong Un's shadowy realm without emotional wounds. Suspicion and fear are their constant companions.

Kim has remarried, and he now has an 11-year-old daughter in Seoul. But he and his wife sleep in separate bedrooms. He says that he shouts and thrashes around in his sleep.

Fresh lychees, pudding and tea are served, along with one last bottle of Soju. By then, Kim has had enough to drink, just as he does every day. He drinks to forget, and he drinks so he can sleep.

But, before that, Kim pulls a photo out of a transparent sleeve. It depicts him as a young officer. Another photo shows the three children he left behind in North Korea. Defectors don't like to talk about their families because the latter have almost always suffered bitterly.

Kim says that, after his defection, his wife and children were sent to Yodok, a notorious prison camp. According to Kim, his wife lost her mind and died shortly after her release, and the children were later shot to death.

Kim is crying. He couldn't do anything to rescue them, he sobs. Now he is stealing as many souls from the dictator as possible, he says. His goal is 10,000.

That, says Kim, is his revenge.

Weapons in North Korean ship are operational

AP (11.10.2013) - Two Cuban fighter jets seized from a North Korean ship in July were in perfect condition to operate and the 15 plane engines that were found along with them were relatively new and could be used as replacements, a Panamanian official said Friday.

The comments by Belsio Gonzalez, director of Panama's National Aeronautics and Ocean Administration, appear to contradict the explanation of the cargo given by Cuban authorities.

The ship, Chong Chon Gang, was intercepted July 15 in the Panama Canal with 25 containers of Cuban military equipment found beneath the 10,000 tons of sugar. The equipment was not listed on the ship's manifest. The ship's captain and 35 crew members remain in custody in Panama.

After the seizure, Cuba said the cargo included "obsolete defensive weapons" including two MiG-21 fighter jets and 15 motors, nine missiles in parts, and two anti-aircraft systems that were being shipped to North Korea "to be repaired and returned."

But Gonzalez said in an email Friday that the fighter jets "are in operational condition and their engines are in excellent shape."

He said the planes were iconic in the 1960s and 1970s and their navigation systems are obsolete compared to jets built in recent decades, "but they are still fighter planes."

A Panamanian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to be quoted by name, said the aircraft had fuel in them, which suggests they had recently been used.

"To say they are obsolete is incorrect," the official said.

The officials said that the weapons' shipment was part of an agreement between Cuba and North Korea and that Havana was going to receive \$200 million for them.

Cuban authorities did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

A U.N. panel of experts monitoring sanctions against North Korea visited Panama in mid-August to investigate the arms seizure. But its report has yet to be made public.

U.N. sanctions state that member states shall prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of all arms and materiel to North Korea, and related spare parts, except for small arms and light weapons.

Saenuri lawmaker receives dubious NK parcel

The Korea Times (10.10.2013) - Rep. Ha Tae-keung of the ruling Saenri Party said Thursday that he received a threatening parcel last week, allegedly sent by North Koreans.

Previously a North Korea human rights activist, Ha still devotes himself to such tasks, including pushing ahead with legislating North Korean Human Rights Law.

The parcel, sent from Shenyang in northeast China, arrived on Oct. 2 at Ha's office in Busan.

Ha said the parcel box contained a skull-shaped purple mask and white shirt slashed with a knife. On the front side of the shirt, were red letters that read: "You will pay the price for your sins," "Family," "Life," "Honor," and "Rights."

Police are currently conducting fingerprint and DNA identification checks.

The first-term lawmaker said the communist state is possibly to blame, quoting North Korean defectors as saying that the expressions written on the shirt are what North Korea has been using.

The South and North use an identical language system, Hangeul, but there are some differences in accent and expression.

"It would be premature to conclude it was an act by the North because the investigation is still ongoing. But the possibility that North Koreans in China sent the parcel cannot be ruled out," said Ha at a press conference in the National Assembly.

The lawmaker said cooperation from the Chinese government is necessary to discern who sent it.

"As long as the North Korean government is suspected of being the sender of the parcel, China needs to actively cooperate in the investigation because North Koreans have already committed many crimes in China such as producing counterfeit money and drug trafficking," said Ha.

He said he will autonomously attempt to figure out the truth of the case by utilizing his human network in China. "At the same time, I plan to seek the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to officially ask China to investigate it," said Ha.

Before becoming a lawmaker, Ha established and led a private radio station, Open Radio for North Korea, to disseminate South Korean news as well as world news to people in the North.

Ski lifts, cognac and human rights in North Korea

Does North Korea's anger at Switzerland's refusal to supply ski lifts for the country's first luxury ski resort suggest that stricter sanctions could work?

New Statesman (09.10.2013) - North Korea is due to open the country's first luxury ski resort this Thursday. The Masik Pass will cater to an estimated 5,500 skiers in the country, or 0.2 per cent of the population, the Associated Press reported. Masik Pass has however come up against one big problem: no one wants to sell them ski lifts. The Swiss recently pulled out of a \$7.7m deal, citing sanctions on the import of luxury goods to North Korea, and French and German manufacturers have also said no. North Korea's state-run media has called the Swiss decision a "serious human rights abuse".

To put this into perspective, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in North Korea are imprisoned in forced labour camps, where as well as carrying out backbreaking work, they are starved, denied medical care, and face constant beatings, and even executions, by camp staff. Around 10 per cent of the population suffers from malnourishment, and the average worker earns around \$4 a day. Citizens are not allowed to leave the country, and anyone who questions the status quo risks detention without trial, torture and even public execution.

The United Nations sanctions on luxury products were intended to put pressure on North Korea's regime in response to its nuclear weapons tests. While North Korea's leadership is unlikely to worry too much about the effect of crippled economic growth on its populace (as long as they are starved into submission, rather fired up for revolt), it was hoped a ban on luxury products will focus the minds of the North Korea's cognac-swilling elite - North Korea's late dictator (and the father of its current leader) Kim Jong-Il reportedly spent \$720,000 a year on Hennessy cognac.

Unfortunately, no one can agree on what counts as a 'luxury' item, and China in particular, while agreeing to sanctions in principle, tends to apply a far narrower definition than most. North Korea doesn't publish data on its imports, but UN data from 2010 details exports including 50,000 bottles of wine, 3,559 sets of videogames from China, 3,191 cars (including one from Germany costing almost \$60,000) and 839 bottles of spirits worth an average of \$159 each.

This [Radio Free Asia](#) article describes department stores in North Korea's capital Pyongyang selling Chanel perfume, designer clothing and Rolex watches to the country's elite, and senior North Korean officials visiting China have [no problem stocking up](#) on luxuries to take home.

The big fuss that the North Korean regime is kicking up over ski lifts suggests that Switzerland's decision to respect sanctions has hurt and riled the country's leadership. In Iran we may be starting to see sanctions having an impact, and similarly tighter sanctions on North Korea may well be the best, if not the only way, to force North Korea's leadership to start serious negotiations about its nuclear weapons programmes, and hopefully (but perhaps less realistically) be pressured into domestic reform. Ski lifts are not a human right, but perhaps together with cognac, videogames and luxury cars, they can be a tool for promoting them.

North Korea continues to be a totalitarian state but the regime turns a blind eye to the development of underground private economy

Conclusion of a recent fact-finding mission of Human Rights Without Frontiers in the Korean Peninsula

HRWF (09.10.2013) - The North Korean regime continues to be a totalitarian state, the oppression of the population is ongoing and none of the fundamental individual freedoms are respected: freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of movement, and so on. This is the main conclusion drawn by Pierre Rigoulot, director of the Paris-based Institute of Social History and author of the book "The Aquariums of Pyongyang", who carried out a fact-finding mission in Seoul for *Human Rights Without Frontiers* from 26th September to 4th October. Moreover, the sealing off of the border between China and North Korea seems to have been strengthened in the last few months, he said.

Living conditions remain difficult and precarious, even if some observers note some stabilization and sometimes some slight progress in the macro-economic area. Though, the durability of totalitarianism must not conceal some very important realities concerning the North Korean population and the future of human rights in the DPRK.

On the one hand, it should be noted that the Party-State has alleviated its control on economic activities. This process started during the mid-1990s famine when the state was forced to allow the population (mainly women) to take the necessary initiatives to guarantee the survival of families. This economic alleviation has become more marked with the passing time, though with ups and downs.

A significant part of the population is concerned by this development. Thanks to the information and products coming from China, most North Koreans are now aware of the living standards of their neighbors. A part of this population, namely the leaders and senior managers of state companies (they are officially all state companies), now behave like real private businessmen and under cover of their official status make a lot of profit. The state just levies a tax on these activities and paradoxically benefits from this system as well.

On the other hand, the state cautiously tries to take back the control of the situation. Quite recently, it has initiated a number of timid but authentic reforms in the agricultural and industrial realm. The objective is to grant more autonomy to the companies and not to submit them any more to rigid planning.

It remains to be seen if the state will just keep it to some experiments (for the moment, one per province) or if it will attempt to extend this new economic policy.

North Korea undeniably seems to be at a turning point of its history but we do not know if the steering mechanism still works in this 70-year old vehicle.

Defectors agonizingly close to freedom sent back to North Korean nightmare

CNN (01.10.2013) - "Pack your bags you're going to South Korea." These are the words nine young North Korean defectors had waited years to hear having traveled thousands of miles.

Unfortunately it was a lie.

The tragic story of this group of youngsters aged between 15 and 23 takes us back a few years when one by one they managed to cross the heavily-guarded border from North Korea into China to search for food. Most of them were orphans, while others had a parent unable or unwilling to look after them.

A South Korean missionary living in China, known only as M.J. to protect his identity, tried to help the youngsters and has broken his silence to CNN.

"This one child used to live with his father," he explained. "One day his father went into a North Korean military base trying to find food but was caught and beaten to death on the spot. The child witnessed this ... his mother then told him not to come home and threw rocks at him to keep him away."

Rodents 'a luxury'

The youngsters survived by foraging for scraps in trashcans. Fish bones and discarded rice were mixed to make a porridge, while rodents were considered a luxury. When M.J. first met some of them in December 2009, they had frostbite on their hands and toes from living in an old abandoned building where temperatures plummeted to as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius. Some of them had injuries from beatings by security guards and merchants when they were caught stealing food.

One of the nine, a 20-year-old man, told M.J. he wanted to live in China as "even beggars in China do not go hungry."

"These kids were suffering from malnutrition and disease," recalled M.J. "They had been living in quarters with bad sanitation ... also they all seemed to have suffered in one form or another from tuberculosis. Because they were suffering from malnutrition, their growth was stunted."

M.J. and his wife offered to help the youngsters leave China for Laos -- a landlocked country in South-East Asia -- and then onto a third country, perhaps South Korea or the United States to claim asylum. It is a route that is well traveled by defectors, and the missionary couple had already helped other North Koreans escape to a better life that way.

Living in fear

The nine lived with the couple and several other North Korean defectors in China for almost two years in constant fear of being discovered by the authorities. They could

never leave the house during this time. China doesn't treat North Koreans in its territory as refugees and usually sends them back across the border.

"The children had been fugitives for a long time so they were used to this situation," he said. "We had a bed which was buttressed with quite a few books on the bottom as legs. The kids would go under the bed and kick out the books, so the bed would sit low and it would not look like anyone was hiding under it."

The couple tried to organize adoptive parents for the youngsters in the United States but without success. And so the long trip to the Laos border began.

The youngsters experienced some firsts along the way: One defector celebrated his birthday for the very first time; they visited an amusement park, which was a new experience; and they played barefoot on a beach for the first time. Finally, they were able to enjoy simple pleasures many children across the world take for granted.

"As we lived with these children, I saw them change," M.J.'s wife, who also asked not to be identified, said. "They started having hopes, they started dreaming and I know they were happier. I was overjoyed to have done something worthwhile."

The escape

After successfully getting six other defectors out of the country to safety via other routes, the missionary couple paid a broker to transport the remaining nine across the China-Laos border because they had no papers or passports. On about May 10 this year, they embarked on a journey that would take them through the jungle in the dead of night to avoid detection. This journey would ordinarily take 40 minutes, according to the missionaries, but this time it took four hours due to heavier than usual border security that day.

But crossing the border proved to be the easy part. On a bus en route to the capital, an unexpected police search changed the course of events. The youngsters were detained and then investigated for more than two weeks by Laotian immigration officials because of their lack of paperwork. M.J. admitted the police search surprised him as it had never happened with previous refugees he had helped pass through the country.

If we don't pay attention, if we don't keep asking where these children are, then these children will be lost forever and we will never know what happened to them. M.J.

M.J.'s wife said they repeatedly called the South Korean Embassy in Laos for help. "We pled our case with the embassy because this was not just about one life but nine lives of young people ... for the embassy it was extra work and a burden to them and why should they care about these children from North Korea?"

M.J. said embassy officials told them to wait and do nothing to jeopardize things as Laos authorities were working to process the youngsters. He said no-one from the embassy visited them in eighteen days.

Bitter truth

On May 27, the Laos authorities told the youngsters to pack as they were being sent to South Korea. M.J. said they were so happy they all shouted for joy. Years in hiding seemed to finally be over. But the bitter truth of the situation soon became clear.

The missionary couple was prevented from following the children and instead locked in a room at the immigration offices for two hours. The United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, said the group had been sent back to North Korea via China.

Human rights groups were shocked. The missionaries were devastated.

"In these children's minds, they were going to South Korea," said M.J.'s wife. "They never imagined after crossing the border to Laos they would be sent back to North Korea."

The children have since been used for propaganda purposes in Pyongyang, appearing on state-run television in June claiming they had been tricked into leaving North Korea and expressing thanks to leader Kim Jong Un for saving them and bringing them back.

"What I am concerned about is what is going to happen after the propaganda is gone and the rhetoric is over," said M.J. "If we don't pay attention, if we don't keep asking where these children are, then these children will be lost forever and we will never know what happened to them."

Laos was widely criticized for its actions by the U.N. and human rights groups but insists the youngsters were in their country illegally and that the missionaries were effectively human traffickers.

South Korea's foreign ministry told CNN it prioritizes the life and safety of North Korean defectors and is "inspecting the problems revealed from this incident and has improved and strengthened the overall support system."

But M.J. and his wife fear for the nine youngsters, who dreamed of a life without hunger and fear.

For the video please click on this link:

http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/30/world/asia/north-korea-laos-defectors-hancocks/index.html?hpt=hp_c5

North Korea prison inmates have suffered 'unspeakable atrocities'

The Guardian (17.09.2013) - UN investigation based on testimony from exiles follows pressure to build a case for criminal prosecution

Inmates in [North Korea's](#) prison camps have suffered starvation, torture and other "unspeakable atrocities", UN [human rights](#) investigators said on Tuesday in their first report on violations in the repressive state.

The paper, swiftly rejected by Pyongyang, uncovered a pattern of human rights abuses, the head of the independent inquiry told the UN human rights council.

There have long been concerns about [reports of atrocities including executions and torture](#), but they have largely been overshadowed by international alarm about North Korea's nuclear weapons.

Tuesday's report came after pressure by Japan, South Korea and western powers to investigate and begin building a case for possible criminal prosecution. The inquiry's

head, Michael Kirby, said the findings were based on testimony from North Korean exiles, including former political prison camps inmates, given at public hearings in Seoul and Tokyo during August.

"They are representative of large-scale patterns that may constitute systematic and gross human rights violations," Kirby added.

The former justice of the high court of Australia told the council: "I have been a judge for a very long time and I'm pretty hardened to testimony. But the testimony that I saw in Seoul and in Tokyo brought tears to my eyes on several occasions, including testimony of Mr And Mrs Yokota."

Their daughter, Megumi Yokota, 13, vanished on her way home from school in Japan in 1977. [She was one of 13 Japanese citizens that Kim Jong-il, the late father of the current leader Kim Jong-un, admitted in 2002 to having kidnapped in the 1970s and 1980s to help train spies.](#) Pyongyang has said eight of them are dead, including Megumi.

Some North Korean exiles testified that they had faced torture and imprisonment "for doing nothing more than watching foreign soap operas on DVDs", Kirby said. A North Korean woman testified to having "witnessed a female prisoner forced to drown her own baby in a bucket". Kirby cited testimony of torture, starvation, and punishing generations of families under the so-called practice of "guilt by association".

Kirby said the independent inquiry would seek to determine which North Korean institutions and officials were responsible.

The report did not say what kind of prosecution might be considered. North Korea is not a member of the international criminal court, but the UN security council can ask the Hague-based court to investigate alleged abuses by non-signatories.

North Korean diplomat Kim Yong-ho said the inquiry was a fake and defamatory political plot to force regime change in North Korea. It had been politicised by the European Union and Japan, "in alliance with the US hostile policy", Kim said.

"We will continue to oppose any attempt of regime change and pressure under pretext of 'human rights protection'," he said.

North Korea's main ally, China, joined by Belarus and Syria, were among countries defending it during the 90-minute debate.

"Politicised accusations and pressures are not helpful to improving human rights in any country," said Chinese diplomat Chen Chuandong. "On the contrary, they will only provoke confrontation and undermine the foundation and atmosphere for international human rights co-operation." The situation of the Korean peninsula had recently shown a "positive trend of relaxation", he added.

The commission of inquiry was launched by the Geneva forum in March to investigate reports of violations in the secretive state, including possible crimes against humanity. [Shin Dong-hyuk](#), North Korea's best-known defector who escaped a political prison camp where he was born, was among those who testified in South Korea.

Kirby, referring to Shin, said: "We think of the testimony of a young man, imprisoned from birth and living on rodents, lizards and grass to survive and witnessing the public execution of his mother and his brother."

The investigators, who have not had access to the country despite repeated requests, said the testimony by defectors and other witnesses and "extensive evidence" stood unanswered.

Kirby challenged Pyongyang to produce "an ounce of evidence" in its defence.

Elite North Koreans buy out luxury shops in Pyongyang

Radio Free Asia (13.09.2013) - Members of North Korea's privileged inner circle are lining up to purchase expensive imported luxury items, leaving stores unable to meet demand, according to officials and residents of Pyongyang, in stark contrast to daily life in much of the nation's impoverished countryside.

An official of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea from North Hamgyeong province, near the border with China, said that the country's elite class is "going beyond bounds in living a life of luxury" in the capital.

In some cases, shelves with expensive items turn empty immediately after they are restocked, underscoring the ironic pent-up demand for luxury goods in a country where in certain areas securing a single meal can be a major challenge.

"A one-piece dress from U.S. fashion house St. John is in vogue among rich women in Pyongyang ... [and] there is a shortage even though it costs U.S. \$2,000," the official told RFA's Korean Service, speaking on condition of anonymity following a recent visit to the capital.

Additional sources confirmed that the value of the dress was enough to purchase two tons of rice and five tons of corn in North Korea, which frequently suffers from food shortages, and could support a family of four for up to three years.

Sources said there are about a dozen department stores in Pyongyang which sell luxury items, some of which deal in both domestic and foreign products, while others sell imported goods exclusively.

Two of the most popular stores stocking lavish products from abroad in the capital were recently opened by Jang Song Thaek, the uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The stores are located on Ansangtaek St. in the Moran Hills district and in Eastern Pyongyang's Rugosa Rose [Haedanghwa] Hall.

At the store on Ansangtaek St. it is not uncommon to see long lines anxious to purchase the imported goods, the Party official said, while the seven-story store at Rugosa Rose Hall is also similarly packed with patrons.

Among the more popular items for women are Chanel stockings at U.S. \$250 per pair and perfumes at around U.S. \$300 per bottle, while men were buying up Rolex watches at more than U.S. \$10,000 a piece, the official said.

He said that imported luxury watches had gained popularity as a more subtle means of exhibiting wealth amongst the well-to-do in Pyongyang, while wearing a Swiss Rolex watch is an indication of access to frequent overseas travel.

Murky details

A second source in Pyongyang, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told RFA that the operations of Jang's two luxury brand stores were opaque.

"The import luxury brand shops on Ansangtaek St. and in Rugosa Rose Hall are operated by Jang Song Thaek, and nobody knows where the items originated or how the profits are used," the source said.

U.N. sanctions prohibit exports of luxury items to the North, including certain kinds of jewelry and precious stones, yachts, luxury automobiles, and racing cars.

The Pyongyang resident said that for the privileged class, life in the capital often involves dressing in goods purchased from the luxury stores, eating at expensive restaurants in Kaesong Youth Park, and staying at extravagant hotels in the Moran Hill district.

Last month, sources told RFA that tailors in North Korea had been producing knockoff designer clothing to cater to Pyongyang elites inspired by the fashions of First Lady Ri Sol Ju, who has displayed a penchant for luxury brands and been photographed in chic outfits.

Known for sporting high heels, sparkly broaches, and foreign designer wear, the celebrity wife has blazed a new fashion trail in an impoverished country where most are relegated to a Spartan communist dress code of sharp haircuts and patriotic pins.

Luxury store owner Jang is seen as a powerful player in Pyongyang politics and is believed to have assumed a caretaker role during young Kim Jong Un's precarious transition to power in the wake of his father Kim Jong Il's death from a heart attack in December 2011.

Jang, the Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission of North Korea, was brother-in-law to the elder Kim, who was known for his taste for exquisite wines, rare cigars, and fine foods.

Commission of Inquiry and its implications for North Korea

HRW (02.09.2013) - The adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution establishing an international Commission of Inquiry into the "systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights" in North Korea is an important breakthrough. It signals the extremely grave concern with which the UN views the decades of rights abuses in the country. The establishment of the Commission of Inquiry was the outcome of a 10-year-long process and gradual shift of the political landscape within the Human Rights Council. It was also made possible by the extensive documentation work led since 2004 by the holders of the UN Special Rapporteur mandate on the situation of human rights in North Korea.

One of the most immediate implications of the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry is the deployment of a large investigative team, with the unique ability to gather testimonies, collect evidence and document abuses committed in North Korea. The work achieved by the HRC Commission of Inquiry has the potential to enhance the future of the international community's engagement on human rights in North Korea, from stepping up the focus on accountability to further projecting the voices of the victims of human rights violations in the country.

Failure of North Korean's defensive approach at the international level

For almost a decade the North Korean government has defied repeated appeals of the United Nations and other international actors to cooperate and improve the human rights situation in the country. North Korea's response to allegations of violations documented by the Special Rapporteur and other NGO monitors was simply to deny the facts. By stepping up its engagement and establishing a Commission of Inquiry, the Human Rights Council clearly signalled to North Korea that its denial of basic facts and defiance of its human rights obligations as a member state of the United Nations will no longer be tolerated.

Ø The North Korean government has repeatedly failed to cooperate with the UN. It has categorically rejected all resolutions adopted by the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly on the situation of human rights in North Korea.

Ø Since the establishment in 2004 of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, the government of North Korea has refused to acknowledge, meet or otherwise cooperate with the Special Rapporteur. The government has repeatedly stated its position that it rejects the UN Human Rights Council decision to establish the mandate. During the nineteenth session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2012, the North Korean Ambassador rejected the Special Rapporteur's report, branding it a "useless interpretation" which was "fabricated by hostile elements."

Ø Since 2003, the North Korean government has rejected all offers for technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ø During its review through the UN Universal Periodic Review process, the North Korean government expressly denied all instances of reported abuses, claiming that allegations are based on "distorted facts or fabrication" or that negative assessments of the human rights situation in North Korea are "based on misinformation fabricated by those who betrayed their country."^[1]

Erosion of the support of North Korea's allies over human rights issues

The adoption of the March 2013 resolution on North Korea is the firmest indication that member states in the UN will no longer stand by and tolerate human rights abuses in North Korea. Since the initial adoption of resolutions on North Korea by the Commission on Human Rights in 2003 and the establishment of the Special Rapporteur's mandate in 2004, a large majority of states had supported the UN action to denounce human rights violations in North Korea, but a small yet determined group of States opposed such action or refused to support it.

In 2008, after four years of work by the Special Rapporteur, things started to change and since then the number of supporters of the resolutions has steadily increased:

Year	Res number	Yes	No	Abstentions
2008	Res 7/15	22	7	18
2009	Res 10/16	26	6	15
2010	Res 13/14	28	5	13
2011	Res 16/8	30	3	11

Ø When the HRC resolution on North Korea was adopted in March 2011, the only three member states voting against the resolution were China, Russia and Cuba. In March 2012, those three same states decided to let the resolution pass without a vote but dissociated themselves from the consensus. For the first time the resolution on human rights on North Korea went unopposed. From that point forward, the UN

was able to increase its pressure on North Korea and strengthen its capacity to investigate abuses.

Ø The voting pattern of the resolutions on North Korea at the UN General Assembly followed a similar trajectory in terms of political support since 2008.

Year	Res number	Yes	No	Abstentions
2008	RES/63/190	94	22	63
2009	RES/64/175	99	20	63
2010	RES/65/225	106	20	57
2011	Res/66/174	123	16	51
2012	RES/67/181	Adopted without a vote		

Ø In his statement to the General Assembly's Third Committee in November 2012, the Special Rapporteur called member states to consider the establishment of a "more detailed mechanism of inquiry." In his report to the Human Rights Council in March 2013, the Special Rapporteur went further by concluding that there is a "need for the establishment of an inquiry mechanism with adequate resources to investigate and more fully document the grave, systematic and widespread violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and report to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly."[\[2\]](#)

Earlier in the year, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay had also stated that "an in-depth inquiry into one of the worst – but least understood and reported – human rights situations in the world is not only fully justified, but long overdue." She said: "the time had come for a full-fledged international inquiry into serious crimes that had been taking place in the country for decades."[\[3\]](#) She was followed on February 28 by the similar call of a group of thematic procedures of the Council voicing support "for the implementation of an international inquiry into human rights abuses in North Korea."[\[4\]](#)

Added value of the work of the Commission of Inquiry:

Commissions of inquiry help uncover the truth about violations through rigorous investigation; they give voice to victims and help push for accountability for violations. The reports of the special rapporteurs on North Korea have so far shed light on the general situation in the country and reported annually on the grave patterns of violations. But the establishment of the commission of inquiry will allow for a more detailed investigation of the allegations of violations. The commission of inquiry will also benefit from additional resources to carry out its investigation. As a result of this commission's work, it will be possible to draw conclusions about the specific patterns of abuses, the legal qualifications of the crimes and the need for accountability. The commission would bring additional international political attention commensurate with the seriousness of the situation, bolstering the efforts of the Special Rapporteur to date and ensuring that human rights remain at the core of the international community's dealings with North Korea. The high profile of the inquiry will also bring more attention to the human rights situation in North Korea, including through the media, and provide an opportunity to press UN and government decision makers to do more to respond the situation.

What if North Korea continues refusing to cooperate?

Given its track record of rejecting the UN human rights mechanisms, the government of North Korea is very unlikely to cooperate with a UN commission of inquiry. Just before the adoption of the resolution during the March 2013 session of the Council, the

delegation of North Korea "resolutely rejected" the draft resolution and qualified the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry as a "hostile act."

Access and cooperation are generally thought as being important criteria for the success of the work of commissions of inquiry. Yet lack of access and cooperation are not elements which would prevent the commission of inquiry from carrying out its work. The commissioners have the capacity to define working methods and a methodology for their investigation that adapt to the constraints imposed by an uncooperative government. Today, many thousands of victims of abuse of the North Korean government live outside North Korea, particularly in South Korea. Those persons will be in a position to testify to the Commission and tell their stories of surviving egregious and systematic human rights abuses.

The commission will also be able to gather evidence from other sources such as families of victims who have gathered and documented information about the violations their loved ones suffered, and NGOs operating in South Korea, Japan, Thailand, and elsewhere who work closely with North Koreans who have successfully fled North Korea. In what is an important innovation, the Commission of Inquiry plans to hold public hearings in South Korea and Japan in August 2013 to receive evidence from witnesses as well and to create greater awareness of the commission's mission and mandate.

In the absence of cooperation and access by the government of North Korea, the engagement of other countries will be crucial for the success of the commission's documentation efforts. In this regard, it is regrettable that China has so far refused to host a visit of the Commission of Inquiry to implement its mandate. This also stands in sharp contradiction with China's current bid for a seat at the Human Rights Council for the 2014-2016 membership term, as the founding resolution establishing the Human Rights Council requests that all elected members "shall fully cooperate with the Council."

The Commission would also be able to use satellite imagery and other hard data available on the country. Since the Commission will also focus on the issue of abductions, the Commission will be able to interview families of nationals from South Korea, Japan, Thailand, and other countries who have been abducted by North Korean agents and then transported and held against their will in North Korea.

North Korea's refusal to cooperate will not prevent the UN from investigating the violations occurring in North Korea and determining whether they constitute crimes against humanity. In fact, commissions of inquiry or similar UN investigative mechanisms have been established, and been able to carry out thorough and effective investigations, despite refusal of the government of the country to cooperate. Recent examples where governments didn't cooperate include the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, the Goldstone Fact Finding Mission on the 2008 Gaza Conflict and the UN Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka.

Looking ahead: The challenge of accountability

The Commission of inquiry has been requested by the Human Rights Council to "investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in North Korea (...), with a view to ensuring full accountability, in particular where these violations may amount to crimes against humanity."

The Commission will have to determine whether the violations it documents and the patterns it identifies, including in the areas listed in the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, amount to international crimes, and if so, under which category of crime they fall. This legal characterization will not only be required to identify the gravity of the crimes committed, but also in the process of identifying their possible perpetrators.

Indeed, in order to name any specific persons as suspected perpetrators, it is necessary to define the international crimes for which they might be held responsible. The Commission will therefore have to collect a reliable body of evidence that would indicate which individuals may be responsible for the violations committed.

The investigation report to be produced by the Commission on Inquiry will represent a major step towards international accountability for the crimes committed in North Korea. The Commission is indeed also requested to propose measures to ensure that all those responsible for international crimes in North Korea could be held accountable.

Should the Commission of Inquiry conclude that human rights violations committed in North Korea amount to crimes against humanity, the International Criminal Court (ICC), as the permanent judicial organ set up to try individuals for the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, could be an appropriate body to address the need for accountability in the country. But several challenges arise in relation to possible action by the International Criminal Court with regard to suspected international crimes committed in North Korea.

First, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not a state party to the Rome Statute which established the ICC. Therefore, for the ICC to be able to act with regards to North Korea, Pyongyang would have to accept the ad hoc jurisdiction of the court, or decide to join the Rome Statute, or the UN Security Council would have to vote to refer the situation to the ICC. This last option however faces important geopolitical challenges with the likely opposition of China and/or Russia, both of which are permanent members of the Security Council who could veto any such referral of North Korea to the ICC.

In addition, even if the Security Council were to refer the situation in North Korea to the ICC, the temporal jurisdiction of the Court does not apply retroactively and remains limited to crimes committed on the day of or after the entry into force of the Rome Statute, on 1 July 2002. While most of the crimes of abduction of foreign nationals occurred before the establishment of the ICC, the Special Rapporteur on North Korea mentioned that enforced disappearances – whether they amount to crimes against humanity or not – “constitute continuous acts that are on-going as long as the fate of the victim is not clarified and on this ground already not affected by prescription.”^[5] However, many other crimes committed before July 2002 would fall outside the jurisdiction of the Court.^[6] The work of the Commission would therefore be crucial to explore the temporal aspects of the international crimes committed in North Korea and advise on the most appropriate accountability mechanisms for North Korea.

Regardless of the UN response on accountability, the UN Security Council should include human rights in its consideration and debates on the situation in North Korea. So far, the Security Council has failed to raise human rights as part of its debates on North Korea. The reason is because in part North Korea is not a conflict situation, but also because the Security Council's agenda on North Korea has primarily focused on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The work of the Commission of Inquiry could also contribute to mobilize Security Council members to seriously include a human rights angle in its their discussion of the situation in North Korea, by demonstrating that the grave human rights situation in North Korea might also constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Conclusion

The work of the Commission of Inquiry on North Korea provides the UN with a unique opportunity to investigate, analyze and legally qualify the human rights violations occurring in the country. It may well be a one-off exercise – but it is crucial to ensure the Commission's efforts have a long term effect. The outcome of the 10 months of

documentation by the three members of the Commission and their staff can have a crucial impact on the future debates around the human rights situation in North Korea. NGO activists engaging on human rights in North Korea should press for Governments to implement the recommendations of the Commission that will come out of its work. Governments and civil society organizations should also consider the establishment of a follow up mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Commission's key recommendations. A major challenge, once the inquiry has finished its work, will be to ensure that human rights violations in North Korea continue to be documented. The widespread and continuing nature of the violations, as well as the fact that information often reaches human rights experts only several years after the violations have occurred, should lead the international community to consider advocating for a follow up mechanism that will allow the UN to continue recording the abuses. Will the existing mandate of the Special Rapporteur be sufficient post-COI? Should the UN equip the Special Rapporteur with extra means to be able to continue the task once the COI has finished its work?

In closing, the COI will hopefully help redress the lack of recognition and support that North Korean victims and defectors have received over the past years. Once and for all, the work of the COI should help clarify that talking about human rights in North Korea is not about taking sides in an ideological confrontation but about the legal obligation to protect individuals from abuse, about restoring the dignity of those who have suffered abuse and holding those who have violated their right accountable for their crimes.

[1] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, A/HRC/13/13, 4 January 2010, para.89.

[2] UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Marzuki Darusman, A/HRC/22/57, 1 February 2013, para. 31.

[3] Pillay urges more attention to human rights abuses in North Korea, calls for international inquiry, 14 January 2013:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12923&LangID=E>

[4] UN experts call for an international inquiry into North Korea human rights abuses, 28 February 2013:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13058&LangID=E>

[5] A/HRC/22/57, para. 27

[6] A/67/370, para 38

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Pan Mun Jon armistice

HRWF (21.06.2013) - Sixty years ago to the day, on July 27th 1953, the Korean War came to an end. Kim Il Sung, - today's North Korean leader's grandfather - had started it three years before with the approval of Joseph Stalin and the support of all the communist parties of the world. Thanks to the opposition of the UN and the sacrifice of more than 50.000 American soldiers fighting under its command (approximately the same number of US troops died in Vietnam), not to mention all the fighters, Dutch, French, Turkish, British, Colombian, etc., who lost their lives in this conflict, the attempt by the "socialist camp" to capture the whole of the Korean peninsula was foiled. The lies and manipulations surrounding a so-called "bacteriological war" that the US was said to fight there, - and those lies were spread everywhere by all the communist parties of the world, French communist party included -, were unable to sway public opinion as they were able to years later during the Vietnam War, the arguments used then being somewhat different. And it's only because thousands and thousands of Chinese soldiers

fought alongside the North Korean Army that the North Korean régime set up by the Soviets north of the 38th parallel after the defeat of Japan in 1945 did not collapse.

After the armistice was signed in July 1953, - and there is still no peace treaty today -, China and the USSR went on helping a North Korean state which started building a totalitarian régime unparalleled in the rest of the world. And it is still thanks to the protection of Red China that the so-called "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" can build the atom bomb, oppress its own people and ceaselessly threaten and provoke a South Korea which thanks to a capitalism that the North cannot stand has in sixty years become a free and prosperous country.

We call on all of you who want some 25 million North Koreans who are presently subjected to famines, an insane propaganda and the fear of being sent to a concentration camp, to denounce not only the protections and complicities from which the Pyongyang régime still benefits today, but also its horrendous crimes. We should also try and keep the North Koreans informed of what is going on in the outside world, especially in our western democracies.

It is part of our duty to let the North Koreans know that freedom lies outside their borders and that one day their horrendous régime will die in infamy.

Robert Pépin, Pierre Rigoulot, André Sénik and Guy Tissier for the French Committee to Help the Population of North Korea

US Envoy for North Korea calls the human rights situation "deplorable"

By Dr Mark Barwick, Human Rights Without Frontiers International

HRWF (21.06.2013) - The European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights heard testimony that the situation in North Korea is "deplorable." This was the term employed by Ambassador Robert R. King, United States Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues, when he addressed the parliamentary body on Wednesday.

King's visit came after a recent decision by the UN Human Rights Council to establish a Commission of Inquiry to examine human rights abuses in North Korea and ahead of an EU delegation to the Korean Peninsula planned for the end of July 2013.

Since the accession of Kim Jong-un to power in 2011, North Korea's foreign policy has shifted slightly from one of isolation to one of more engagement with the international community, said King, but the reality both inside and outside of North Korea has not changed. The country's nuclear ambitions still pose a formidable threat to regional and international security, chronic poverty and food shortages plague the vast majority of North Koreans and a steady stream of defectors continue to flee the country.

What can be done to bring the regime in Pyongyang to meaningful dialogue on these issues? asked one MEP. Ambassador King believes that one important strategy is to "break down the information barrier." There are already signs of this happening, he said, such as the increase of North Koreans who have mobile telephones, listen to foreign radio programs and watch DVDs from other countries. On the long term, such exposure to the "outside world" can only result in more dissent from the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong-un.

King also highlighted the importance of giving voice to those who have fled the country. In this regard, he mentioned Shin Dong-hyuk, who escaped a prison camp in North Korea and now speaks internationally of his experiences there. On 6th June, Human Rights

Without Borders co-hosted a conference in the European Parliament, where Shin Dong-hyuk gave testimony of the situation in North Korea. Such events, said King, give a "human face" to the suffering in North Korea and can stimulate international outrage over this issue.

North Korea: Establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry

On 6 June, MEP Anna Rosbach organized a conference on "Human rights in North Korea" at the European Parliament with Human Rights Without Borders and NKDB. Around 140 people attended. HRWF presented a paper about the UN Commission of Inquiry in crimes against humanity in North Korea (See below). On the same day, the German TV Channel ZDF which covers Germany, Austria and Switzerland aired a report at the 21:45 pm TV Journal

([http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek#/beitrag/video/1917144/Shin-Don-Juk-aus-Camp-14"-geflohen](http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek#/beitrag/video/1917144/Shin-Don-Juk-aus-Camp-14))

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Borders

HRWF (18.06.2013) - On 22 March 2013, the UN Human Rights Council decided at its 22nd session to establish a special, three-person UN Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to examine rights abuses in North Korea. This was the result of an 18-month campaign carried out by the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) which was created in Tokyo in September 2011. ***Human Rights Without Borders Int'l*** participated in the meeting that put in place the International Coalition. In the next few months, more than 40 human rights organizations from all the continents and a few experts on North Korea joined the International Coalition.

This is a historical step towards ensuring accountability for human rights abuses in North Korea. This initiative is in line with a number of resolutions adopted in the last few years by the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council as well as with the reports of the successive UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights in North Korea. The violations of the UN standards in this hermit state are described as "systematic", "widespread" and "egregious".

The EU and human rights violations in North Korea

The European Union has sponsored several UN Resolutions at the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly since 2003. Entitled "Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", these resolutions articulate the fears regarding the worrying situation of human rights in North Korea.

In November 2009, the resolution – adopted with 99 votes in favour to 20 against and 63 abstentions – called North Korea to immediately put an end to the systematic, widespread and grave human rights violations in the country, to fully cooperate with the UN human rights system and to ensure full, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid on the basis of need in accordance with humanitarian principles.

The EU was also instrumental in securing UN Human Rights Council resolution on 25 March 2010 about the "Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" prepared by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea, Vitit Muntarbhorn. Tabled by the EU and Japan, the resolution supporting the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur was passed by the 47-member council with 28 votes in favour, 5 against and 13 abstentions.

The European Parliament has also adopted a number of resolutions about North Korea and MEPs have always sponsored the conferences and other events we have organized to raise awareness about specific issues: the food crisis, the plight of North Korean refugees in neighbouring countries, the abduction of Japanese and other foreign citizens, and so on.

The European Union, Japan, South Korea and the USA played a crucial early role in persuading other key countries to support the creation of the Commission of Inquiry. A number of EU member states also played leading roles in making the UN Commission a reality. Consequently, North Korea's regime will now be under greater pressure than ever to account for its extensive human rights violations.

Why is a UN Commission of Inquiry needed for North Korea?

First of all, the persisting deterioration of the human rights violation in North Korea, the systematic non-cooperation of Pyongyang with the UN human rights mechanisms – including with the UN Special Rapporteur – and the rejection of UN resolutions on North Korean human rights make the setting up of this new mechanism particularly timely.

Moreover, it must also be stressed that there is no domestic mechanism of complaint or redress for the victims of grave human rights crimes in North Korea. Therefore, the Commission of Inquiry will give them an opportunity to ensure their voices, and their experiences, reach decision-makers in the UN and the international arena. In this way, the Commission will serve as an entry point to ensure that North Korea's human rights record – and the issue of accountability for those abuses -- will be increasingly placed at the core of the international community's approach vis-à-vis North Korea. For families of foreign nationals abducted and forced to North Korea, the Commission will also offer an opportunity to demand the return of their loved ones.

The Commission of Inquiry will be put under the leadership of the current UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, Marzuki Darusman, and the UN will appoint two additional independent experts of significant stature to join him in carrying out an in-depth investigation.

The resolution that established the Commission of Inquiry called for it to be "adequately resourced," meaning it will have the means to carry out a serious investigation. Its mandate will be to "investigate all systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea." Particularly encouraging is the fact that the Commission's mandate stipulates an investigation into the full range of regime abuses. Several areas are specified: violations of the right to food, treatment of prison camp inmates, torture and inhumane treatment, arbitrary detention, discrimination (among other things, the calibrated deprivation of families based on perceived degree of loyalty), violations of the right to life, restrictions on personal movement, and enforced disappearances, including of foreign nationals, with a view to ensuring full accountability, in particular where these violations may amount to crimes against humanity.

Part of the problem is not only the seriousness of the violations but the lack of information about them. The Commission is expected to provide more detailed figures showing the number of prisoners who are still in the political camps and the number of persons who have been released. By collecting the testimonies of victims, their families, survivors and witnesses and gathering all other available information, the Commission should produce a highly authoritative account on the patterns of abuse in North Korea that can inform further future actions towards accountability.

What are the available avenues of accountability?

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and the crime of aggression committed AFTER entry into force of the ICC Rome Statute on 1 July 2002.

Unfortunately, North Korea is not a party to the Rome Statute, will not want to become one and will not accept its jurisdiction. The Security Council can refer the situation of North Korea to the ICC under its Chapter VII powers but a positive vote by 9 of the 15 Council members would be required without any veto of none of the five permanent members. Obviously, at least China would object to it.

The "Universal Jurisdiction" might be another avenue of accountability. This mechanism allows the domestic judicial system of states or international organizations to investigate and prosecute a person accused of certain crimes - such as war crimes and torture, genocide and crimes against humanity - regardless of where the alleged crime was committed, and regardless of the accused's nationality, country of residence or any other relation with the prosecuting entity. Crimes prosecuted under the Universal Jurisdiction are considered crimes against all.

According to Amnesty International, a proponent of the universal jurisdiction, certain crimes pose so serious a threat to the international community as a whole that states have a logical and moral duty to prosecute an individual responsible for it; no place should be a safe haven for those who have committed genocide, crimes against humanity, extrajudicial executions, war crimes, torture and forced disappearances. The Geneva Conventions and the Convention Against Torture oblige state parties to extradite or prosecute alleged offenders who are under that state's jurisdiction.

A number of countries have passed a universal jurisdiction law or are entitled to exercise universal jurisdiction.

Australia: In 1991, the High Court of Australia confirmed the authority of the Australian Parliament, under the Australian Constitution, to exercise universal jurisdiction over war crimes in the "Polyukhovich v. Commonwealth" case.

Belgium: In 1993, it adopted such a law but it was amended in 2003 in order to reduce its scope.

Canada: To implement the Rome Statute, Canada passed the "Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act". According to Michael Byers, a law professor at the University of British Columbia, this law goes further than the Rome Statute, providing Canadian courts with jurisdiction over acts pre-dating the ICC and occurring in territories outside of ICC member-states. "As a result, anyone who is present in Canada and alleged to have committed genocide, torture [...] anywhere, at any time, can be prosecuted [in Canada]," he said.

France: The article 689 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure* states the infractions that can be judged in France when they were committed outside French territory either by French citizens or foreigners: torture, terrorism, nuclear smuggling, naval piracy and airplane hijacking.

Germany, Israel, Malaysia, Spain and UK also have similar mechanisms, though with limitations as well.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry is not a magic rod that will allow the international community to put an end to the egregious violations of human

rights in North Korea. International jurisdictions are still too weak and too fragmented to cope with the problems posed by North Korea, which is a *sui generis* case, but the universal jurisdiction avenue deserves to be further explored by experts in international law as a credible and complementary alternative.

Media coverage of the conference

- Peace in the Peninsula? (Dawn, 8 June 2013): <http://dawn.com/2013/06/08/peace-in-the-peninsula/>
- Shin Dong-hyuk wins UN Watch moral courage award for "stirring the conscience of mankind" (Blain Harden): <http://www.blaineharden.com>
- New Generation of Defectors Expose North Korean Abuses (Daily Maverick, 12 June 2013): <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-06-05-new-generation-of-defectors-expose-north-korean-abuses/#.UbhG0xaQAZa>
- New Generation of Defectors expose North Korean Abuses (Ammon News, 6 June 2013): <http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=21258#.UbhIOxaQAZa>
- New Defectors Expose North Korean Abuses (Malaysian Digest, 5 June 2013): <http://www.malaysiandigest.com/world/362051-new-defectors-expose-north-korean-abuses.html>
- New Generation of Defectors Expose North Korean Abuses (The Star, 5 June 2013): <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2013/6/5/worldupdates/new-generation-of-defectors-expose-north-korean-abuses&sec=Worldupdates>
- Human Rights in North Korea: EU must push for change (Political Press, 6 June 2013): <http://politicalpress.eu/2013/06/human-rights-in-north-korea-eu-must-push-for-change/>
- European Parliament Event on Human Rights in North Korea (Peterson Institute for International Economics, 26 May 2013): <http://www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=10461>
- European Parliament Event on Human Rights in North Korea (Silo Breaker, 26 May 2013): http://news.silobreaker.com/european-parliament-event-on-human-rights-in-north-korea-5_2266846330737393664

6 Reasons why Kim Jong Un is screwed

The Atlantic (20.06.2013) - For all the bloviating, North Korea is actually changing from the inside out, and things don't look good for its leadership.

The North Korean state is increasingly an anomaly in the world today, a throwback to some of the most egregious authoritarian regimes of the 20th century. The regime prevents any political dissent through collective punishment in political prison camps for not just the offending individual, but also their whole family. This means there are no known dissidents or human rights activists inside the country; no North Korean Aung San Suu Kyis or Liu Xiabos, and therefore no leaders for alternative domestic political forces to organize around.

If North Korea falls, the ruling elite fears it will be absorbed into the larger and richer South Korean system, where anybody who is anybody -- in the military, internal security forces, the party, government officials, even the new economic elites -- could lose their jobs to their counterparts from the south and see the system they rely on for power and wealth disappear. Former officials could find themselves on trial or even suffer reprisals from citizens who have been oppressed for so long.

North Korean refugees have reported evidence of several long-term, significant, irreversible social trends that will eventually lead to their country's transformation.

This uncertainty heightens the ruling elite's fear of instability and makes them averse to any kind of change that may accelerate their loss of control.

But wait, there's hope.

North Korean refugees have reported evidence of several long-term, significant, irreversible social trends that will eventually lead to a transformation of North Korea.

The trigger for these social changes was the collapse of the state-socialist economy in the 1990s, which led to a famine that killed up to one million North Koreans. Out of that tragedy emerged the survival mechanism of grassroots marketization, which enabled people to provide for themselves and others with food, goods and services that the government could not or would not provide. In this changing North Korea, we have identified six reasons why the North Korean people will drive a transformation of their country in our lifetime.

Here are the reasons North Korea is unsustainable.

1) Economic Divergence

Reliable data on North Korea's economy is unsurprisingly hard to come by, but the simple truth is that the current system is unable to foster economic development. This is primarily the result of the regime's absolute prioritization of political control. The obsessive effort to micromanage society stifles the people's potential, holding them back and effectively enforcing poverty on them.

By contrast, over the past 50 years South Korea has gone from being one of the poorest countries in the world to sitting between Israel and New Zealand in per capita GDP (see above chart). The difference between North and South Korea's economies is already the biggest of any two neighboring countries in the world. Just 30 years ago, China was poorer than North Korea; now North Koreans who manage to travel to China (or even just look across the river) are amazed at the bright lights and development they see there. As the rest of the region races ahead, the regime's strategy of obstinately denying change will become incrementally more difficult, especially as this economic discrepancy becomes increasingly obvious to the people.

2) Grassroots Glasnost

The regime has traditionally denied free speech and isolated its people from the outside world in order to maintain its monopoly as the only source of information inside the country. There is no Internet access for all but a select group of officials, and every newspaper and TV station is a mouthpiece for the regime.

However, this information blockade is crumbling, and increasing numbers of refugees report watching South Korean dramas and Hollywood (and even Bollywood) movies that

are smuggled in on DVDs and USBs from China. There is also a growing number of Chinese cell phones that are used in border regions to call contacts in China and South Korea -- highly illegal but massively lucrative. Many North Koreans leaving the country more recently report having a much better awareness of the reality of the outside world - including the relative advancement of South Korea -- than those who left 10 or even five years ago.

The spread of new technologies and information cannot be stopped, and as the information flows increase the regime will be faced with a simple choice: either align their narrative about their country closer to reality, or watch as their traditional narrative becomes increasingly hollow and powerless.

3) Explosion of Corruption

The corruption that was born of the 1990s economic collapse has also led to a loss of control over grassroots society. The regime is essentially broke and cannot provide a budget to most government agencies, nor can they afford proper wages for most officials. Paired with the emergence of new routes to private wealth through the informal economy, bribes and kickbacks have become widespread.

North Koreans consistently tell us that to get ahead or even just survive in North Korea, you have to break the regime's rules, and that money enables all of those rules to be broken. Corruption is therefore steadily eroding the regime's control and authority over society, and there is no effective way to rein this in unless the system itself changes.

4) Refugees Bridging Back Into North Korea

There are tens of thousands of North Koreans that have illegally escaped and have resettled in South Korea, Europe, and North America, and thousands more are leaving every year. These resettled refugees are playing a crucial role in accelerating change in their homeland by serving as a bridge back into North Korea.

An estimated 50 percent of resettled refugees maintain contact with their families back inside through illicit channels and illegal Chinese cell phones. This provides a route for information about the outside world, which is then spread around by word of mouth. Perhaps even more importantly, refugees are sending money back to their North Korean relatives through broker networks. An estimated \$10-15 million is being sent each year, enabling family members to bribe security officials, protect themselves, and even invest in entrepreneurial business activity or smuggling operations. Refugees' remittances are fueling the grassroots economy, speeding up the erosion of regime power, and increasing the bottom-up forces for change.

5) Jangmadang (Market) Generation

There is a quiet demographic revolution happening in North Korea. North Koreans born in the 1980s and 1990s have no personal memory of the days under Kim Il Sung, when a functioning state-socialist system actually provided for the people and there was little reason to doubt the official ideology. North Korean millennials instead grew up in an era characterized by marketization and self-interest, with the regime seeming like more of an obstruction than a provider. Their natural youthful curiosity and willingness to take risks also coincided with unprecedented access to illegal foreign media that got many of them hooked on fascinating glimpses of other possibilities.

Many of the refugees are part of this new so-called *jangmadang* (market) generation, and it is very apparent that they have a different psychological relationship with the

regime leadership. They do not care as much about the Japanese colonization or the Korean War, and *Juche* or socialist ideology is almost irrelevant to them.

The regime's old methods of control through indoctrination and micro-management may even be counterproductive for some of these young North Koreans. And it is only a matter of time before the *jangmadang* generation makes up the majority of society.

6) Bonds Between the People

Lastly, a result of many of these changes -- particularly marketization and information flows -- is that the North Korean people are more connected to each other than ever before, and they increasingly depend on each other more than they do the regime. This is significant because the state has historically relied on the isolation, atomization, and disempowerment of the North Korean people by instilling a culture of fear and distrust among the citizenry.

This fear is still present in North Korean society, but as mutual trust and dependence within communities gradually grows, the people are increasingly likely to engage in shared illegal behaviors such as watching foreign media and even criticizing the regime together (another trend reported by recent refugees), gradually strengthening the bonds between them. When the people feel more loyalty to each other than to the party, and are more connected to each other, collective empowerment and the bottom-up pressure for change will gradually become a greater force.

It is impossible to predict the precise pathway or timeline for change in any society, let alone one with the research challenges of North Korea. The regime might even see that change is coming and proactively adapt and reform in response while managing the transformation. Or it may bunker down, and change will eventually be forced upon them.

What we can be sure of though is that these trends of empowerment are irreversible, and they mean that in the long term, change in North Korea is inevitable.

Human Rights in North Korea

MEP Anna Rosbach and HRWF Director Willy Fautré wrote an article in the Parliament Magazine that recent developments in North Korea mark a huge step in combating human rights abuses

Parliament Magazine (27.05.2013) - On 22 March 2013, the UN human rights council decided to establish a special UN commission of inquiry (CoI) to examine rights abuses in North Korea. This is a historical step towards ensuring accountability for human rights abuses in North Korea. The initiative is in line with a number of resolutions adopted in the last few years by the UN general assembly and the human rights council as well as with then reports of the successive UN special rapporteurs on human rights in North Korea. The violations of the UN standards in this hermit state are described as "systematic", "widespread" and "egregious".

The European Union, Japan, South Korea and the US played a crucial early role in persuading other key countries to support the creation of the CoI. Consequently, North Korea's regime will now be under greater pressure than ever to account for its extensive human rights violations.

The persisting deterioration of human rights in North Korea, the systematic non-cooperation of Pyongyang with the UN human rights mechanisms and the rejection of UN

resolutions on North Korean human rights make the setting up of this new mechanism particularly timely. Especially encouraging is the fact that the commission's mandate stipulates an investigation into the full range of regime abuses: violations of the right to food, treatment of prison camp inmates, torture and inhumane treatment, arbitrary detention, discrimination, violations of the right to life, restrictions on personal movement, and enforced disappearances, including of foreign nationals, with a view to ensuring full accountability.

The international criminal court (ICC) has jurisdiction over crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and the crime of aggression committed after entry into force of the ICC Rome statute on 1 July 2002. Unfortunately, North Korea is not a party to the Rome statute.

The Security Council can refer the situation of North Korea to the ICC but a positive vote by nine of the 15 council members would be required without any veto of any of the five permanent members.

The "universal jurisdiction" might be another avenue of accountability. This mechanism allows the domestic judicial system of states to investigate and prosecute a person accused of certain crimes – war crimes and torture, genocide and crimes against humanity – regardless of where the alleged crime was committed, the accused's nationality, country of residence or any other relation with the prosecuting entity. Crimes prosecuted under the universal jurisdiction are considered crimes against all.

A number of countries have passed a universal jurisdiction law, though with some limitations: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Malaysia, Spain and the UK. International jurisdictions are still too weak and too fragmented to cope with the problems posed by North Korea, which is a sui generis case, but the universal jurisdiction avenue deserves to be further explored by experts in international law as a credible and complementary alternative.

Conference at the European Parliament: The EU urged to play a more active role

By Martin Banks for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (06.06.2013) - The European Union has been urged to play a more pro-active role in alleviating "atrocious" human rights abuses in North Korea.

The plea was made by Anna Rosbach, a Danish Member of the European Parliament, at a special hearing in the assembly on Thursday.

The participants in the conference - more than 140 people - heard a harrowing and graphic account from Shin Dong-hyuk of his life in a North Korean labour and prison camp before escaping to South Korea. This led Rosbach to say the EU could play the role of "honest broker" in trying to tackle such issues.

The centre-right politician told the meeting in the European Parliament the bloc had a role to play despite not having any strategic interests in the region, adding, "Europe is a long way away from Korea and is relatively neutral but could use its 'soft power' to assert more influence in tackling human rights issues."

"It has an important role to play, not just by its High Representative, but each of the EU institutions."

The four-hour hearing was particularly timely coming as North and South Korea tentatively agreed on Thursday to hold talks about reopening the shared manufacturing zone where Pyongyang halted activity in April.

After months of unsettling tensions, the North proposed the meeting to discuss the shuttered Kaesong Industrial Zone -- a major symbol of cooperation between the two countries -- along with other issues.

The North's menacing rhetoric against the United States and South Korea hit a fever pitch in March and April after the U.N Security Council voted in March to slap tougher sanctions on the regime and amid U.S.-South Korean military drills in the region. The U.N. sanctions were in response to the North's third underground nuclear test, which took place in February

In the last few days, nine young North Koreans were repatriated to North Korea from Laos where they had hoped to find freedom from North Korea, one of the world's most repressive states.

The hearing heard from Shin, 30, who is the most well-known defector from North Korea, who said he wanted to draw attention to the country's human rights record.

Shin is the only known North Korean to have been born in a prison camp and to have escaped. He was the subject of a 2012 bestselling book called "Escape from Camp 14" by journalist Blaine Harden.

He told the packed meeting that he was born in the infamous prison camp No. 14 where he witnessed regular abuse, including the violent death of a young girl. He said, "I wanted to do something about it but was unable to do so. I was just thankful that I wasn't that girl."

After experiencing other "horrors" in his 24 years in the camp, including the execution of his mother and brother, he fled the camp in 2005 to South Korea where he now lives.

In an often passionate speech, he said, "The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes were soldiers pointing guns at me and I always thought I would die in that camp."

He said, "There are people in these camps today suffering far worse than even I did. But these people are not animals, they are human beings."

Shin, who was warmly applauded for his intervention, also appealed to the international community, including the EU, to "do more" to address the issue.

Speaking in a session on human rights in North Korea, Dr Yoon Yeo-sang, Chief Director of the Database Centre for North Korean Human Rights, said the current picture was mixed in that while there had been an improvement in some areas, there were still concerns.

He told the meeting that there are about 200,000 prisoners languishing in North Korean prisons and 25,000 defectors from the North in South Korea.

The centre, which has collated data on 42,000 cases of alleged abuse against 23,000 individuals, had actually reported a decline in recent years in some types of violations, something he described as "positive". But concerns remained about the rights of suspects and also the right of North Koreans to move and reside.

He also recalled how, on his release, Shin had been so traumatized by his experience that "it was difficult to make eye contact with him" and he needed psychological counselling.

Another speaker in the second sessions on the ruling Kim regime was Dr Aaron Rhodes, co-founder of the Freedom Rights Project, who was particularly scathing of the international community for failing to put more pressure on China in order to improve human rights in North Korea.

He said, "If we are serious about bringing pressure to bear on North Korea we need to get out of our comfort zone and go to the people in states that defend North Korea. We need to ask if they can tolerate travesties like that being voiced in their name."

Dr Rhodes, who is based in Hamburg, said, "The Chinese government ought to change its heartless and illegal policy of forcibly repatriating refugees from North Korea and the UNHCR ought to press China on this issue."

In a veiled message to the EU, he added, "China's partners in the international community need to demonstrate that they are ready to uphold international human rights standards even if it means putting economic benefits at risk."

Further contribution came from Willy Fautre, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International which, with the ECR group and Database Centre, sponsored the meeting.

In a similar situation to the recent incident involving the nine youngsters, he recalled how he had been in Laos five years ago to meet 15 North Korean defectors who also had sought freedom.

Fautre also pointed to a new U.N commission of inquiry that hopes to gather information from prison camp survivors and others to document violations that may amount to crimes against humanity.

Describing the inquiry as "historic", he said he hopes it will fully probe "systematic and widespread" violations of this "hermit" state.

Pointing out the European Parliament had adopted several resolutions about North Korea, he added, "The creation of an inquiry is not a magic rod that will allow the international community to put an end to the egregious violations of human rights in the North.

"International jurisdictions are still too weak and fragmented to cope with these problems but the universal jurisdiction avenue deserves to be further explored and a credible and complimentary alternative."

The lively debate was moderated by Shada Islam, a leading Brussels-based Asian expert, who said there was "great concern, both individually and collectively" about the current situation in North Korea, not just about human rights but also about the North's controversial nuclear and missile programs, which lie at the heart of the tensions surrounding North Korea.

She also cautioned against unrealistic expectations about the latest talks between North and South which had been billed by the media as a potential breakthrough. "We have to be careful indeed about raising expectations where the North is concerned," she told participants.

Pointing to an upcoming meeting between President Obama and Chinese leaders she suggested the talks over the shared manufacturing zone could be a ruse by the North to defuse American criticism of Pyongyang.

The Lao government is also culpable in the serious harm that these North Koreans will likely face in North Korea. While Laos has not ratified the Refugee Convention, it is still bound by customary international law to not return people to a situation where they will face certain torture.

"Laos and China again demonstrated their disregard for human rights by allowing the North Korean government to forcibly return these nine people without fulfilling their obligations to allow refugee status determination," Robertson said. "These three governments will share the blame if further harm comes to these people."

North Korea: Denial of Rights Forces Back Refugees

China and Laos Put Nine North Koreans, Including Children, at Risk of Torture, Imprisonment

HRW (30.05.2013) - [North Korea](#) should immediately reveal the whereabouts and well-being of nine North Korean refugees who were forced back to Pyongyang from Beijing on May 28 according to media reports, Human Rights Watch said today, emphasizing that the government must ensure that they are not punished for having fled the country. Under international law, individuals have the right not to be forcibly returned to a place where they face persecution.

"North Korea has to come clean on where these nine refugees are and publicly guarantee that they will not be harmed or retaliated against for having fled the country," said [Phil Robertson](#), deputy Asia director. "As a result of their return they are at dire risk – North Korea criminalizes unauthorized departures and is known to torture those caught trying to escape and those sent back."

Media reports indicate that Lao government officials detained the nine people on May 10 and held them for more than two weeks, during which time South Korean diplomats who had requested access to the group were not permitted to meet them. Varying reports suggest that the members of the group range from ages 14 to 23. The Lao government sent the group to Kunming, [China](#) on May 27, and Chinese government authorities reportedly checked their travel documents before transferring them to Beijing on the evening of May 27.

On May 28, the nine were reportedly put on a flight to Pyongyang. North Korean officials allegedly accompanied them in their journey from [Laos](#) to China, and from China to North Korea. There is no indication the nine were given the opportunity in Laos or in China to lodge asylum claims.

North Koreans who leave the country face certain harsh punishment upon repatriation, making them refugees *sur place* (that is, people who become refugees as a result of fleeing their country or due to circumstances arising after their flight). Human Rights Watch's findings from years of interviews with North Korean refugees are that the intensity and degree of interrogation, torture, and punishments depend on North Korean authorities' assessments of what returnees did while outside North Korea, and whether they were seeking to contact, do business with, or flee to [South Korea](#). Persons suspected of contact with South Koreans, or attempting to defect to South Korea, are frequently given lengthy terms in horrendous detention facilities known as *kyo-hwa-so* (correctional, reeducation centers) where forced labor is combined with chronic food and medicine shortages, harsh working conditions, and mistreatment by guards.

The North Korean Ministry of Public Security adopted a decree in 2010 making defection a crime of "treachery against the nation."

A senior officer of the North Korea Security Department (*bowibu*) who defected in 2011 told Human Rights Watch that "every captured defector [in my area] was sent to me" and described torture during interrogations of defectors. He said "psychological suffering is the first... they are put in solitary confinement and minimum food given, only enough for surviving... A person saying nothing will be beaten. Depending on the reaction, beating will be different."

Such punishments clearly contravene the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which North Korea has ratified. Specifically, article 12 (2) provides that "everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own" and article 7 states that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

In returning the North Koreans, China once again violated its commitments as a state party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1984 Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment. The 1951 Refugee Convention sets out in article 1 that a refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..." As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Handbook makes clear, persecution that arises as a result of, or after, fleeing one's country also fulfills this qualification. The Convention against Torture, article 3, provides, "No State Party shall expel, return (refouler) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture." This protection is considered a norm of customary international law, binding on all nations, and is therefore incumbent on both China and North Korea to respect.

The Lao government is also culpable in the serious harm that these North Koreans will likely face in North Korea. While Laos has not ratified the Refugee Convention, it is still bound by customary international law to not return people to a situation where they will face certain torture.

"Laos and China again demonstrated their disregard for human rights by allowing the North Korean government to forcibly return these nine people without fulfilling their obligations to allow refugee status determination," Robertson said. "These three governments will share the blame if further harm comes to these people."

North Korean captors free Chinese fishing boat crew

The mysterious circumstances resemble those of an abduction a year ago.

LA Times (21.05.2013) - After being held for more than two weeks, a Chinese fishing vessel and its crew were released by North Korean captors, the boat's owner said early Tuesday.

The release came less than two days after news of the seizure was publicized in Chinese media — and resembled the mysterious circumstances surrounding a similar two-week abduction of crew members on three Chinese fishing boats by North Koreans almost exactly a year ago.

North Koreans siphoned the fuel from the ship before releasing it, said Yu Xuejun, the owner of the Dalian-based fishing operation, in a microblog statement. Yu said he received a call from the ship's captain at 3:50 a.m. Tuesday saying that the boat and all 16 Chinese crew members were returning home.

Yu noted that he did not have to pay the nearly \$100,000 ransom that had been demanded, and he expressed gratitude to China's Foreign Ministry.

North Korea has said nothing publicly about the seizure, and it wasn't until Sunday, after Yu had sent out increasingly desperate distress messages on his microblog over the weekend, that Beijing revealed that the boat had been seized May 5. Yu called the Chinese Embassy for help May 10, China's official news agency said.

Among fishermen in this historic seaport city, the danger of steering their boats near North Korean waters is well known. Chinese maritime officials have repeatedly warned fishing operators over the last several years that they would be slapped with heavy fines if they got too close.

Still, the Korean waters were highly attractive for their abundance of fish. Local fishermen interviewed Monday said it was possible that the Chinese vessel may have drifted near the border, although Yu said that his ship had been fishing in Chinese waters and that there was no legal reason for its seizure.

"I believe both sides have made mistakes," said Cao Zhanyuan, 40, as he sat mending a fishing net late Monday afternoon in Long Wang Tang Port.

The incident had threatened to further complicate the already strained relationship between China and North Korea. Beijing has publicly rebuked its old communist ally over a nuclear test in February and other provocations, and voted along with the United States in support of United Nations Security Council sanctions. Bank of China, the country's largest state-owned bank, this month said that it had ceased dealings with the North Korean Foreign Trade Bank, an action seen as a sign of Beijing's growing frustration with Pyongyang.

The Chinese Communist Party's Global Times newspaper suggested Monday that the capture of the ship might have been in retaliation for Chinese support of the U.N. sanctions.

Although it wasn't certain that the seizure was orchestrated by Pyongyang, the Global Times reported that North Korean "kidnappers" were "highly likely from the North Korean army" and that they had expertly removed positioning and communication equipment from the ship.

Monday's news of the incident triggered another volley of anger at North Korea from China's large and vocal online community.

"The outrage is at its continued brazen behavior, particularly in showing disrespect to China," said John Delury, a modern Chinese history scholar at Yonsei University in Seoul. "It's not about denuclearization."

North Koreans seize Chinese fishing boat

China calls for release of ransomed vessel and crew in case that poses quandary for nominal allies

The Guardian (21.05.2013) - China has urged North Korea to release a Chinese fishing boat and its crew, state media have reported, after its owner announced it had been seized more than two weeks ago.

Yu Xuejun wrote on his microblog on Saturday that armed North Koreans took the boat on 5 May in what he says were Chinese waters and that they demanded a ransom of 600,000 yuan (£64,000).

Xinhua subsequently reported that Chinese diplomats in Pyongyang received Yu's request for help on 10 May. Official Jiang Yaxian told the Chinese state news agency the embassy had asked the North Korean foreign ministry to free the boat and the fishermen as soon as possible and had urged the DPRK to ensure the safety of the Chinese crew and their property.

According to the Southern Metropolis Daily, Yu received a call from North Korea saying his boat had entered North Korean waters, although he maintains it was in Chinese waters. The boat is from Dalian, in north-eastern Liaoning province.

Yu said the North Korean side asked for the ransom to be paid by noon on Sunday to a company in Dandong – a border city where much of the trade between the two countries is carried out – or they would confiscate the boat and repatriate the crew.

It is not clear who is holding the boat but in the past suspicion has fallen on North Korean armed forces taking the initiative locally in the hope of making money.

A year ago three private Chinese vessels with 29 fishermen on board were [seized by a North Korean gunboat](#), with unidentified captors reportedly demanding \$190,000 for the fishermen's release. They were freed less than two weeks later.

"This is not the first time it has happened and it won't be the last," said Cheng Xiaohe, an expert on Sino-North Korean relations at Renmin University.

North Korean forces and Chinese fishermen often played a cat-and-mouse game, with incursions over the line by both sides, he said. Other cases had not become public because boat owners simply paid up but this time the ransom appeared to be much higher than usual.

"This issue will complicate an already troubled relationship between the two countries but I don't think the impact will be significant or lasting. I think with the Chinese government intervention it will be settled quickly," Cheng said.

But he added: "The Chinese side needs to rein in fishermen to make sure they stay in Chinese waters and the DPRK also needs to impose discipline on local military forces."

China is the North's main ally, providing the vast majority of its fuel and most of its trade. But relations have often been tense and major Chinese banks have [halted most dealings with North Korea](#) amid growing frustration over its sabre-rattling and weapons programmes.

John Delury of Yonsei University in Seoul said: "It's a messy border. We should not assume this is a co-ordinated plot by North Korea because it is upset about foreign trade bank accounts being closed and they have told some guys: 'Kidnap a boat with Chinese fishermen.'

"North Korea is very practised at projecting a monolithic image where everything is choreographed and controlled. I don't think that's the reality."

He added that Chinese leaders were beginning to pay more attention to public opinion about dealings with North Korea, he said. While many in China still empathised with the North in some regards, there was an increasingly vocal strand of opinion asking why Beijing did not have more leverage with Pyongyang.

Orphaned and homeless: Surviving the streets of North Korea

CNN (14.05.2013) - The first time Yoon Hee was abandoned, she was an infant.

She was born in a village near North Korea's sacred Mount Baekdu, where the country's lore claims its founder, Kim Il Sung, led the fight for independence and his oldest son, Kim Jong Il, was born.

But the similarities between Yoon Hee and her homeland's rulers end there.

Six months after her birth, her parents divorced and left Yoon Hee in the care of a friend.

The second time she was abandoned, Yoon Hee was 8 and had gone back to live with her mother.

One day, her mother told her she had somewhere to go. "She never came back," Yoon Hee said.

Yoon Hee had no choice but to live alone in North Korea. So she did what many abandoned North Korean children do -- living on the streets, nearly freezing to death in the winters, begging for mercy, plucking grass for food and crying so hard at night only the pain in her face could stifle her tears.

Yoon Hee stayed in the same neighborhood as her mother in the city of Hyesan, hoping they could live together again.

"I sometimes ran into her on the streets," Yoon Hee said, "but I couldn't ever get a warm feeling from her."

One time when they met, Yoon Hee said, "she told me she was already having a hard time living by herself, so she couldn't live with me."

But Yoon Hee was undeterred.

"I had a hope."

Death by electrocution

Amid tensions in the Korean peninsula, much of the focus has fallen on deciphering the next moves of Pyongyang's new leader, [Kim Jong Un](#).

But all this belies a humanitarian crisis in North Korea, a country that boasts of its military strength and nuclear capabilities and yet has no place for homeless orphans.

"There are many children like me who die," said Hyuk Kim, who fled North Korea in 2011, nearly a decade after becoming an orphan.

In the punishing winters, Hyuk and other orphans would break into sheds containing electric transformers near factories and markets to find a warm place to sleep.

"Many children accidentally end up touching the transformers while sleeping and die," said Hyuk, who asked that his real name not be used for the safety of family members still in North Korea.

As Hyuk dozed off each night curled next to a transformer, he would try to stay as still as possible -- willing himself not to move in his sleep.

"I thought I would live forever this way," he said.

Glimpse into the underbelly

The plight of orphans who've escaped North Korea caught the attention of U.S. humanitarian groups, who've lobbied for years to pave the way for their adoption by Americans and others.

In January, President Obama signed the North Korean Child Welfare Act of 2012, which instructs the U.S. State Department to "advocate for the best interests of these children" -- including helping to reunite families and facilitate adoptions.

The law is [aimed primarily at those orphans hiding in China](#) and other countries. Those who make it to South Korea are provided an education, a path to citizenship and even a chance at adoption.

Gwak Jong-Moon knows the pain orphans suffer. He's the principal of Hangyeore Middle-High School, a South Korean transitional facility open only to North Korean children and teenagers.

About 50 North Koreans under the age of 24 enter South Korea every year without family, according to the South's government. These children only make up about 2% of all North Korean defectors who enter the South.

Some North Korean orphans who survive the treacherous escape from their homeland by way of China end up in South Korean boarding schools, dormitories or group homes.

Adoption in South Korea is not a common practice, but Gwak said "adopting is natural, and worthy."

"There are some South Koreans who adopt our school's children, although not many," he said. "Children here with South Korean adults who don't officially adopt, but act like their parents make unbelievable progress."

We recently traveled to Seoul to meet some of these orphans and the people caring for them. Originally we wanted to learn more about their lives in South Korea -- what it's like trying to integrate into an alien society after living in one of the most isolated countries in the world.

We visited Gwak's school earlier this year -- on a majestic campus more fitting for a temple, tucked away in snow-crueted hills about an hour from Seoul. We also visited the Seoul home of a pastor who is raising five North Korean orphans.

In both places, we met children and teenagers scarred by their experiences. Although we could not independently confirm the details of their individual histories, advocates who work with them say they have heard consistently similar testimonies.

We also heard stories of children struggling with South Korean culture, targeted by bullies, befuddled by K-pop and puzzled by mundane tasks like managing money and taking public transportation.

But we also got a glimpse into the underbelly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea -- from the perspective of those who occupied one of the lowest rungs of society, far removed from the idyllic vision portrayed in the nation's propaganda.

'I am going to die'

Not long after running into her mother in the streets, Yoon Hee fell ill. Alone and 10 years old, she lay in the snow as the icy winter descended in North Korea.

Eventually, Yoon Hee caught what she suspects was typhoid, leaving her in a hell of fire and ice. Although she lay in the snow about two weeks, no one offered help or food.

She tried to muster her energy to sit and wiggle her fingers and toes, but her hands and feet barely budged -- they were frozen in place. She could no longer move.

Surely, this was it, Yoon Hee thought. She prepared herself. "I am going to die."

Yoon Hee would become yet another corpse rotting in the street -- she had seen the frozen corpses on the roadside because no one bothered to bury bodies of strangers.

A voice interrupted her feverish daze.

A villager had appeared. Yoon Hee recognized her as a woman who was struggling to feed her own children.

The villager thrust money into Yoon Hee's hand. Her voice was firm: "You have to survive."

Helping defectors escape

In North Korea, homeless children like Yoon Hee are called "kotjebes," or flowering swallows. Like the bird, these children are free to roam, unconstrained by the country's societal norms.

Without parents, family or schooling, they don't have as much exposure to the state propaganda that is engrained from childhood, according to advocates. When they escape to neighboring China, it is not so much for political reasons, but to find food.

[A U.N. assessment in March](#) found that of the country's estimated 28 million people, 16 million are chronically deprived of food.

Peter Jung is among those working on behalf of North Korea's orphans. Based in Seoul, he leads Justice for North Korea, which describes itself as a "volunteer, non-partisan, grassroots organization" that opposes human rights violations in North Korea.

Jung first met North Korean orphans in 1998 in northern China, where he had gone to learn Mandarin.

Jung was stunned to see the stunted size and condition of North Korean orphans. "It was too shocking to believe," Jung said. "There were children who had skin diseases and with bloated stomachs, collapsing in the streets because of malnutrition."

Korean children have been found to be about 3 to 4 centimeters shorter than their South Korean counterparts, according to a 2009 study published in the journal [Economics and Human Biology](#).

Nearly 28% of North Korean children suffer from stunting, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Fifteen years after meeting the first of these street orphans, Jung is still helping defectors escape, working from a small, cluttered basement office in the South Korean capital.

'Hugs and comforts'

For a decade in North Korea, Yoon Hee roamed the streets, slept in crevices and picked rice off the ground that people had dropped.

"I appreciated every single grain of rice," she said.

Every night, she had the same concern: "Where am I going to sleep tonight? How can I survive?"

In Ryanggang province where she lived, the average monthly temperature can fall below freezing during the winter months, [according to the World Food Programme](#).

Yoon Hee learned survival skills fitting of "The Hunger Games" -- where to scavenge for food, where to sleep, how to stay warm, how to keep safe. She curled into a fetal position in a nook under the windows of houses.

"Sometimes, I wrapped my feet with a plastic bag because it was too cold."

She slept alone, except for her thoughts of her mother.

"When I almost was starved or freezing to death, the only things I wanted from her were hugs and comforts. I thought that was happiness."

But she couldn't recall a single hug from her mother.

Surviving in a new home

Hyuk lost his mother when he was 6, then his father when he was 11.

After his father died, he lived with a group of six other orphan boys in North Hamgyong province, located at the northern most tip of the country.

"We started a fire together, but we still couldn't sleep because it was so cold," he said. "We just warmed ourselves with the fire at night and we mainly slept during the day when the sun was shining."

"During the night, we needed to find food to eat. We sometimes stole food from others and gathered food from here and there."

When something went missing in the neighborhood, the blame automatically fell on Hyuk and his friends, even when they had not been involved. The children would be taken to the police station and tied to chairs, he said.

"The police would then automatically accuse us of stealing because they assume we would have stolen since we don't have parents. They hit us, tie us up, and torture us. There was no one to defend us."

Hyuk, now 21, attends Hangeore Middle-High School, where he sleeps in a bed inside a heated dormitory. The school serves three warm, buffet-style meals a day, and students can pile as much food as they'd like on their metal trays.

In the school's hallways, girls with sleek black hair and boys with long sweeping bangs are busy texting and taking pictures of themselves on their phablets -- a combination smartphone and tablet. Their crisply ironed school uniforms would not be out of place at an English or American boarding school.

It's a vastly different scene than the childhood Hyuk describes. The blur of hunger, cold and countless police beatings has been replaced by soccer and basketball.

The school, set up by the South Korean government, does not charge tuition.

The North Korean orphans who escape to South Korea often struggle to catch up in a competitive environment where their counterparts have had years of schooling and private tutoring.

While acknowledging hardships adjusting in South Korea, Hyuk said: "I am very comfortable, because I can openly say anything."

He's anxious about what he'll do after he graduates from the school -- maybe he'll go into operating forklifts, Hyuk said.

A mop of shaggy bangs falls over his round face as Hyuk sits atop a table, his legs swinging freely.

"I can eat, live, and survive here."

Scars from trauma

Most North Koreans escape by crossing the river on the northern border to China. Some street children who flee to China become easy prey to traffickers, according to human rights activists.

The girls are sold into the sex trade, or as wives for rural Chinese men. The young boys are sold as sons into Chinese families who have not been able to produce one, said Jung of Justice for North Korea.

China sends back those escapees they catch, so defectors live in hiding -- fearing they'll be imprisoned and tortured back home.

That fear can continue long after escapees have made it to South Korea.

In the home of pastor Daniel Park, we met a 13-year-old boy whose mother took him to China when he was a year old. The mother was caught and repatriated to North Korea, but the boy remained in China, where he was beaten and abused, Park said.

In Park's Seoul home, the trauma showed. The boy, sporting a buzz cut, was skittish and jumpy around strangers and followed Park closely around the house. During mealtimes, when his foster family would gather to eat, he would take his food and hide in his bedroom and eat alone.

But Park said his habits have since improved.

Escape through China

As Yoon Hee entered adolescence in North Korea, her hopes of reuniting with her mother began to fade.

A few strangers would give money, others would give her food, shoes or clothes after taking pity on her.

"I had hope thinking that there were people out there who were willing to help me," she said.

Yoon Hee also ran errands for neighbors to earn change.

But in 2009, the North Korean government exchanged its old currency for a new one worth just 1% of its original value. It immediately wiped out people's savings and triggered chaos as prices for food became unreachable.

"At that time, so many people were dying," Yoon Hee said. "If I opened my neighbor's door, people were dead, collapsed on the floor. So many people headed for China, I thought that at least I could survive there."

There was nothing left for her in North Korea. Her hopes of reuniting with her mother finally faded.

So she made her first escape into China. In the wintertime, the river at the border freezes, paving the way for a quick escape.

In China, she said she was caught three times by local police and each time, she was sent back to a North Korean prison. She was pummeled with fists, sticks and kicked, Yoon Hee said. But each time, she was released, she said.

In early 2010, she escaped North Korea for the fourth time and eventually met Daniel Park through underground networks of Christian activists and missionaries

Funded by donors and ministries, the networks employ brokers who help refugees cross into China, bribing and using their connections with officials and border officers.

The networks reach Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, countries near China where the authorities will not repatriate North Koreans. From there, North Koreans try to find their way to a South Korean embassy -- where they are sent to Seoul -- or they seek refuge in the embassy of other countries like Canada, Britain or the U.S.

Yoon Hee stayed with Park and his family in China's Zhejiang province, further away from the North Korean border.

"She was bright even though she suffered a lot," Park said, describing his first impressions of the orphan. "I was able to see her pains. She had gone through so many

struggles even though she was very young and sometimes when we would pray for her, she wept."

By October 2010, Park had arranged for Yoon Hee to fly into South Korea.

'Part of the family'

In Seoul, Yoon Hee emerges from her bedroom in skinny jeans and a red, puffy vest, her nails painted bright pink. She slouches slightly, perked up by frequent texts on her yellow Samsung phone -- which is bigger than her hand.

With wide almond-shaped eyes, spotless porcelain skin and silky black hair, Yoon Hee has the kind of features highly coveted in South Korea, a country obsessed with beauty and youth.

At 19, she could easily be mistaken for a middle school student in Seoul. Yoon Hee stands less than 5 feet tall.

She lives with Park, his wife, their two sons, who are toddlers and four other North Korean children -- two boys and two girls.

Their permanent home in Seoul is humble. In the winter, bubble wrap is taped to the windows to keep the house warm.

The walls are scrawled with crayon doodles. Stuffed animals, toy ducks and books rest atop bookshelves and coffee tables. The children crawl over the taupe-colored sofa and scramble onto the living room table.

At times, Yoon Hee talks freely about her life. But there are some questions she'd rather not answer.

She seems more comfortable around the younger children.

And they flock to Yoon Hee as arbiter of all things toddler -- toy disputes and snack requests, cries for hugs and sibling rivalries. The other children squeal and scamper around the house, but Yoon Hee rarely raises her voice with them.

"When they make mistakes, I try to show ways to fix their thinking that they can be guided well," she said, "even though they don't have their moms."

Her kinship with the other orphans is forged out of hardship. Park's two toddler sons look up to her as "unni," or older sister.

"In this house, she's a part of us," Park said. "Part of the family."

When an older child steals a toy from his younger brother, Yoon Hee scolds him.

"It's not OK to steal your little brother's toy," she said. "Why did you do that?"

But as the older child sulks, Yoon Hee pulls him close and tickles him -- giving love and attention that she didn't have in her childhood.

Two years after her arrival in Seoul, Yoon Hee's days are busy from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. with studies and a part-time job.

She sleeps on the floor inside a pristine wood-paneled room with a white teddy bear, lying next to the other North Korean girls on pink blankets.

Sometimes, she dreams of her mother even though she hasn't seen or talked to her in more than a decade.

"I would rather give her love than blame her," Yoon Hee said, "even though I wasn't loved."

In ways, her life has been shaped by her abandonment by those who were supposed to care for her. But Yoon Hee found a new family by abandoning the place that once was home -- but ultimately had nothing left to give.

North Korea sentences American to 15 years hard labor

Reuters (02.05.2013) - [North Korea](#) sentenced U.S. citizen Kenneth Bae to 15 years hard labor on Thursday for what it said were crimes against the state, a move that will likely see him used as a bargaining chip in talks with Washington.

Bae, 44, was born in [South Korea](#) but is a naturalized American citizen and attended the University of Oregon. According to U.S. media, he most recently lived in the Seattle suburb of Lynnwood.

A North Korean defector said Bae will likely serve his sentence in a special facility for foreigners, not in one of the repressive state's forced labor camps. More than 200,000 people are incarcerated in these camps, beaten and starved, sometimes to death, according to human rights bodies.

Bae's sentencing comes after two months of saber-rattling by Pyongyang that saw [North Korea](#) threaten both the United States and [South Korea](#) with nuclear war.

Bae is believed to be a devout Christian, according to human rights activists in [South Korea](#), who say he may have been arrested for taking pictures of starving children, known as "kotjebi" or fluttering swallows.

He was part of a group of five tourists who visited the northeastern North Korean city of Rajin in November and has been held since then.

Some media reports have identified Bae as the leader of the tour group and NK News, a specialist North Korea news website, said he was the owner of a company called Nation Tours that specialized in tours of north-east North Korea.

The reports could not be verified and North Korean state news agency KCNA did not list any specific charge other than crimes against the state, and used a Korean rendering of Bae's name, Pae Jun-ho, when it reported the Supreme Court ruling.

"North Korea has shown their intention to use him as a negotiating card as they have done in the past," said Cheong Seong-chang, senior fellow at the Sejong Institute, a Seoul-based think-tank.

Bae's sentence was heftier than the 12 years handed down to two U.S. journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, in 2009. It took a visit to Pyongyang by former President Bill Clinton to secure their release.

North Korea appears to use the release of high profile American prisoners to extract a form of personal tribute, rather than for economic or diplomatic gain, often portraying visiting dignitaries as paying homage.

According to North Korean law, the punishment for hostile acts against the state is between five and 10 years hard labor.

"I think his sentencing was hefty. North Korea seemed to consider his acts more severe," said Jang Myung-bong, honorary professor at Kookmin University in Seoul and a North Korea law expert.

North Korea is one of the most isolated states on earth. Its official policy of "Juche" or self-reliance is a fusion of Marxism, extreme nationalism and self sufficiency centered on the cult of the ruling Kim family.

Separate jail

Bae will not however be incarcerated in one of the North's notorious slave labor camps, such as the one where defector Kwon Hyo-jin was locked up. There, Kwon said, prisoners were worked to death and often survived only by eating rats and snakes.

"If an American served jail together with North Korean inmates, which won't happen, he could tell them about capitalism or economic developments. That would be the biggest mistake for North Korea," said Kwon, a North Korean sentenced to one of its camps for seven years until 2007. He defected to South Korea in 2009.

"(Bae) would be sent to a correctional facility that only houses foreigners and was set up as a model for international human rights groups,"

It was not known if Bae had been taken immediately to jail.

Ling, the journalist, told U.S. television that she was placed in a 5-by-6 foot cell when captured and then kept in a regular room afterwards.

Bae was given counsel by the Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang, which has consistently declined to comment on the case, as the United States does not have diplomatic relations with the North.

(Additional reporting by Christine Kim; Editing by David Chance and Raju Gopalakrishnan)

North Korea: A Prison without bars

Religious persecution is all too real under the Kim dynasty

National Review Online (15.04.2013) - North Korea's Kim dynasty considers religion a hindrance to the nation's socialist evolution. For 50 years, its secret police has waged a brutal campaign to eradicate religious belief. It has nearly succeeded. But the numbers of Christian believers are now slowly rising (maybe even in the low hundreds of thousands) and they must be prepared to pay with their lives for their faith.

In the early Sixties, Buddhist shrines and temples and Christian churches were shuttered, and all religious literature and Bibles destroyed. Religious leaders were either executed or sent to concentration camps. Some temples that have reopened are mainly historical

cultural sites, not active religious centers. Pyongyang was known in the 1950s as "Asia's Jerusalem" for its robust Christian communities, but the five Christian churches that now exist, all in the capital, are state-operated for international propaganda purposes.

Run like an impregnable fortress, North Korea bans human-rights investigations, and the persecution of religious believers, like other aspects of daily conditions, is barely known. Nevertheless, an [important study](#) by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and a [white paper](#) by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDC), all based on the testimony of refugees over the past ten years most of whom are not religious, help piece together a grim picture of what life is like for Christians and more generally.

These interviews, taken at different times, of different refugees, by different interviewers, corroborate each other and provide powerful evidence of pervasive ideological control, religious persecution, human-rights violations, and government surveillance. These searing voices need to be heard. A representative sample of them follows:

- "North Korea is a prison without bars. The reason why the North Korean system still exists is because of the strict surveillance system. When we provide the information like 'this family believes in a religion from their grandfather's generation,' the [National Security Agency] will arrest each family member. That is why entire families are scared of one another. Everyone is supposed to be watching one another like this. All organizations, the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League, and the Women's League are [gathering information]."
- "There are churches and Buddhist temples in Pyongyang . . . built only for . . . foreigners to attend. When foreigners visit Pyongyang they would go to churches and temples to pray and bow. I never heard of religious books until I came to China."
- "A forty-something woman, who lived in a city of North Pyongan Province, North Korea, was caught with a Bible in her home. She was seized, dragged from her house, and publicly shot to death. Her execution took place on the threshing floor of a farm. . . . I was curious why she was to be shot. Somebody told me she had kept a Bible at her home. Guards tied her head, her chest, and her legs to a post, and shot her dead. It happened in September 2005."
- "Based on a tip-off, around January 2005, agents from the Central Antisocialist Activities Inspection Unit raided my home in a county of North Hamgyong Province. As a result of their search, they found a Bible. I was taken into custody to a political prison camp alongside my wife and daughter. My son, who was staying in China, entered the North without any knowledge about his family's detention. He, too, was later taken to the camp."
- "One cannot even say the word 'religion.' North Korea does have Christians and Catholics. They have buildings but they are all fake. These groups exist to falsely show the world that North Korea has freedom of religion. But [the government] does not allow religion or [independent] religious organizations because it is worried about the possibility that Kim Jong Il's regime would be in danger [because] religion erodes society."
- "In 2001, a woman was taken into custody at a political prison camp for having talked with her neighbors, who had been to China, about religion. One of the neighbors was a government spy. She was forced to divorce her husband, and was detained at a political prison camp and died there."

- “At Christmas time we used to sing familiar Christmas carols such as ‘Silent Night’ and ‘Joy to the World.’ Older North Korean Christians know these too. They sang these carols when they were young. Their parents were Christians at the time of the great revival in 1907. Now they are no longer allowed to sing them, because all Christian activity is forbidden.”
- “‘Underground believers’ would be a more appropriate term than ‘underground church.’ Church would be something like a place where people can gather and listen to a sermon, but it’s impossible to exist for long. Instead, underground believers can exist. There is a chance that two people pair up and hold their hands together to pray. However, a gathering of three or more is dangerous.”
- “In 2003, I watched three men being taken to a place of public execution in a county of North Hamgyong Province [in North Korea]. Among them was a man with whom I had studied the Bible together in China. He was gagged with rags before his execution. When told to say what he wanted to say before dying, he said, ‘O Lord, forgive these miserable people.’ And he was shot dead.”
- “You cannot say a word about [religion or] three generations of your family can be killed. People who lived before the Korean War knew [about religion.] But religion was eradicated. We can only serve one person in North Korea [Kim Jong Il].”
- “Hanging pictures of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il on the wall is an obligation. The purpose of hanging the pictures is to worship Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. There is a ritual done before the pictures. [We] worship Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader who saved us from death and emancipated us from slavery. If a fire breaks out, people would show their loyalty by running into the fire to save the portraits. Anyone who gets burned doing this would win commendation.”

— *Nina Shea is the director of Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom. This article is based on excerpts from Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians (Thomas Nelson, 2013), which she co-authored with Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert.*

China sees spate of defections from North Korean soldiers

Twelve armed North Korean soldiers apparently defected across the border to China’s Jilin Province earlier this month but were captured by Chinese troops and sent back to the North.

Late last month, two North Korean soldiers shot and killed their senior officer and fled to Jilin Province, prompting experts to suspect something unusual is going on in army units stationed along the border with China.

The 12 North Korean soldiers stationed with a border unit defected across the Chinese border in two groups but were sent back after being captured by Chinese troops, a diplomatic source in Beijing said Thursday.

Another source in the Chinese town of Yanji near the border with North Korea, said the other two North Korean soldiers shot and killed their senior officer and crossed over the border into Changbai, Jilin Province, causing Chinese troops nearby to scramble into emergency mode.

The spate of defections may be related to food shortages. International aid to the North has dropped sharply since it launched a rocket in April last year, affecting the food situation for soldiers as well as ordinary people. With food rationing concentrated in Pyongyang and military units along the border with South Korea, troops on the border with China are apparently subsisting on corn and potatoes they grow on their own.

"As spring progresses and crop inventories are depleted further, we may see an increase in the number of defecting soldiers," said an informed source.

Meanwhile, China is still apparently sending back North Korean civilian defectors as well. Eight North Korean defectors who were caught by Chinese security officers in Yanji earlier this month were transferred to a camp for defectors in Tumen and all sent back across the border, according to a source.

Five of them were children, some of whom had reportedly scraped a living by begging for food.

One of two South Korean citizens who were caught along with North Korean defectors was deported to the South on Wednesday. They were former defectors from the North and had entered China to help their families escape.

North Korean diplomats 'sell millions of dollars worth of drugs'

North Korea sent a large amount of illegal drugs to its embassy in an East European country last December and ordered diplomats there to sell it for cash by early April, a diplomatic source here claims.

"South Korean intelligence obtained the information from a North Korean agent who defected recently," the source said. "Similar orders were delivered to other North Korean embassies."

North Korea has ordered each diplomat to raise US\$300,000 to prove their loyalty and mark the birthday of nation founder Kim Il-sung on April 15.

Each North Korean diplomatic mission overseas is required to send back around \$100,000 to the North each year, the agent-turned-defector allegedly said. They used to complain that new leader Kim Jong-un is too demanding.

Each North Korean diplomat is estimated to have been given up to 20 kg of drugs, so the North Korean embassy in the East European country may seek to sell around 200 kg.

Under the guidance of Room 39, a secretive agency that managed the private coffers of former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, the North has been producing various types of illegal drugs and selling them abroad. South Korean authorities estimate North Korea's annual output of illicit drugs amount to 3,000 kg that translate into revenues of between \$100 million and \$200 million.

North Korea mass-produces the illegal drugs in factories in Chongjin and Heungnam under tightly regulated conditions, and as a result the quality is top-notch, said one intelligence official here. "North Korean drugs are highly sought-after overseas."

A large amount of illegal drugs in circulation here is North Korean in origin and smuggled through China.

"Drugs are sent from North Korea several times a year by ship or trucks," the diplomat quoted the defector as saying. "An embassy staffer meets up with smugglers at a secret location to get them."

Arrested N. Korean spy claims to have been coerced by Pyongyang

Yonhap (18.03.2013) - A North Korean woman has been arrested in Seoul after posing as a defector and engaging in espionage activities under threat from Pyongyang's spy agency, according to prosecutors here Monday.

The 43-year-old woman, whose identity is withheld, entered South Korea in August of last year by disguising herself as a North Korean defector. But she was unable to engage in any actual spying because she was arrested during a routine investigation of newly-arrived defectors.

Prosecutors soon indicted the female agent on charges of violating South Korea's National Security Law and sought a seven-year prison term for her.

"I could not help but carry out espionage activities because North Korea's spy agency threatened to hurt my family," the agent was quoted by the source as saying.

The agent, who was an ordinary housewife living in the North, was ordered by the spy agency in October 2010 to spy on Seoul's intelligence agency, they said.

Before coming to Seoul, the woman stayed in China until February 2011 and engaged in spying activities such as collecting information about Seoul's spy agents, they added.

"North Korean spies enter South Korea by disguising themselves as defectors about three to four times a year," a prosecutor said, adding that sometimes there are cases where the spies are forced to engage in espionage by Pyongyang's agency.

Change China's brutal repatriation policy

Huffington Post (15.03.2013) - China's policy of forcibly repatriating North Korean defectors has resulted in brutal punishments including summary execution on a mass scale. As the National Peoples Congress shows small signs of responding to human rights concerns, and as the government works together with the United States to impose sanctions on the DPRK for its nuclear bomb development, the time is right for China to bring its treatment of defectors into harmony with its international human rights obligations.

Over the past 15 years, over 100,000 North Koreans refugees -- 70-80 percent of whom have been women -- have been arrested by Chinese authorities and forcibly repatriated. China has defended these actions by claiming the North Koreans are simply illegal economic migrants. The argument is nonsensical and irrelevant. Regardless of their motives, under international law the defectors cannot be forced back to North Korea since they face "well-founded fears of persecution," which bar them from being repatriated according to the 1951 Refugee Convention signed and ratified by China.

Thanks to the work of independent monitors like the Data Base Center on North Korean Human Rights, hundreds of verified testimonies provide blood-curdling evidence of the

persecution refugees face if returned--persecution they nonetheless risk in order to find freedom outside the DPRK.

Many of those who eventually make it to South Korea or other third countries have done so after being repatriated, punished, and crossing the Tumen River into China again. In Seoul, a North Korean former military officer told me that after her return to the DPRK, guards in a detention facility for political prisoners suffocated her newborn baby before her eyes; she later saw its body stored in a tool shed with other corpses, all of which were being consumed by rats. I spoke with another defector who had witnessed eight female defectors, who had become pregnant in China through rape or having been trafficked into relationships with Chinese men, being subjected to forced abortions.

Another witness was a North Korean nurse. Upon her forced repatriation, she was sent to a labor training camp, where she described conditions as bad as in the DPRK's notorious concentration camps. Inmates endured a hard labor routine beginning at 5 AM and lasting until 10PM each day. With no medical care or sanitation, prisoners suffered from infections and skin diseases as well as from starvation. She said these experiences convinced her that "the DPRK cares nothing for the welfare of its citizens."

A young man who eventually made it to South Korea was beaten so severely after his first defection that he was released from prison to die at home. When he unexpectedly survived, he was taken back into custody. At the first opportunity, still weak and injured, he immediately escaped again with a woman he eventually married. The couple is raising two children in Seoul.

China's treatment of North Korean refugees while they are in the country is also a national humiliation and a violation of human rights standards. Some defectors said conditions in China's border prisons, where defectors are detained following arrest, are as terrible as those in the DPRK. The Chinese government forbids the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to visit border areas and prisons.

Korean women are the primary victims of Chinese repatriation policies. All the female defectors with whom I spoke reported sexual abuse including rape in Chinese custody. Human traffickers, sometimes working in collusion with officials, deceive and sell desperate female defectors as wives for Chinese men; the One Child Policy and other factors have created an acute demand for females in poor rural areas. Female Korea defectors wind up as household slaves. When they bear half-Chinese babies, those children can't be legally registered and receive education and medical care unless it is proven that the mothers have been deported. Many thousands of half-Korean children are stateless, their only care coming from aid workers operating illegally. Human rights activists, missionaries and aid workers trying to help North Korean defectors and their children face jail terms if discovered and prosecuted.

Exposure of North Korea's human rights abuses, which likely qualify as crimes against humanity, will intensify with the appointment of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry. Such scrutiny will likewise expose China's inhumane and illegal treatment of refugees. With a UN examination of China's own human rights record approaching in October 2013, now would be a good time for China to address problems that shame it before the world community.

Aaron Rhodes is a founder of the Freedom Rights Project. He was Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights between 1993-2007, and also helped found the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran.

Domestic politics, Pyongyang-style

New York Times (13.03.2013) - On Monday, [North Korea](#) declared that it had [nullified](#) the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War, a new level of bellicosity that raised, at least on paper, the potential for the resumption of armed conflict on the peninsula.

The fiery rhetoric seemed to foreign observers a desperate attempt to force the United States and [South Korea](#) to restart stalled talks on denuclearization, in the hope of extracting aid and concessions. But recent history suggests that it was motivated less by international politics than by domestic concerns: North Korea's new hereditary leader, [Kim Jong-un](#), may have been stoking fears of a foreign threat primarily to dampen political unrest at home.

The belligerent talk, and the nuclear test North Korea conducted last month, its third, are part of a pattern that began in the 1990s when the North Korean economy collapsed following the end of the cold war.

Faced with chronic famine and international isolation, North Koreans have become acutely worried about their increasing dependence on [China](#).

The Beijing government's diplomatic and financial support has been essential to North Korea for decades, of course. But China's influence in the country began to take on a new dimension in 2002, when it started an ambitious Northeast Asia Project. Ostensibly aimed at better integrating its three northeastern provinces — Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning — with the rest of the country, it quickly became clear that the project also aimed to rewrite Korean history.

At issue was the history of Koguryo (Gaogouli in Chinese), one of the three ancient kingdoms of Korea (along with Paekche and Silla) in the third through seventh centuries. Chinese scholars claimed that, because part of the former territory of Koguryo now resides within China's borders, its history ought to be considered Chinese, not Korean.

The political ramifications of this seemingly abstruse dispute have been far-reaching. South Korea charged that the Chinese government, by claiming [Koguryo](#) as part of its ancient past, was trying to undermine the legitimacy and political authority of North Korea.

The timing of China's apparently sudden interest in Koguryo's history is notable. It began in earnest in 2009, when the Chinese government announced an ambitious economic development program for North Korea. This project, covering the Chinese cities of Changchun, Jilin and Tumen, involved a vast area landlocked by Russia. North Korea agreed to lease the seaport at Rajin, a gateway to the Pacific, as well as sign on to various economic development projects.

By 2011, total Chinese investment in North Korea exceeded \$6 billion. China, in fact, now provides an estimated 90 percent of North Korea's energy, 80 percent of its consumer goods, and 45 percent of the country's food.

As North Korea moves ever closer to becoming the "fourth province" of northeastern China, a pressing question Mr. Kim faces is how to sell this to his people, especially the elite. While many in the West assume that public opinion simply doesn't matter in North Korea's totalitarian state, the dictatorship could not have carried on as long as it has — nearly 70 years — without public support, continually manipulated though it is.

In the past, this support derived from the belief by North Koreans that the North — unlike the South, which is considered a "lackey" of the United States — was the only

legitimate Korea because it abided by a core nationalist ideology of *chuch'e*, or self-determination.

That public conviction in North Korea's self-reliance has become increasingly tenuous as the country's poverty has deepened — and as the propaganda the North Korean masses (and even the ranks of the elite) hear becomes all the more distant from the reality of their lives. And that is what has the Pyongyang regime scared.

As Mr. Kim, who came to power at the end of 2011, tries to consolidate his authority, he has the added challenge of convincing North Koreans that the *chuch'e* principle stands firm even against the "friendly" encroachments of China.

China appears to understand Pyongyang's dilemma, which is why it has continued its ambitious efforts to develop North Korea while shielding the new regime from internal collapse.

Stability on the Korean Peninsula is critical to China's own security, too. North Korea provides China with a buffer between it and the roughly 29,000 American troops stationed in South Korea. While Beijing's patience with North Korea was sorely tested after the nuclear test last month, and China has nominally agreed to economic sanctions, it has too much at stake in Mr. Kim's government to halt or withdraw its support entirely.

South Korea remains deeply suspicious of China, but having cut off all aid to North Korea after it sank a South Korean vessel in 2010, the government in Seoul surrendered any economic leverage over the North it might have had. Although it remains to be seen what policy South Korea's new president, [Park Geun-hye](#), will take toward the North, few South Koreans harbor any illusions about the dire state of the North's economy or the tremendous costs unification would entail.

In the 1990s, more than 80 percent of South Koreans believed that unification was essential; by 2011, that number had dropped to 56 percent. Today, just one in five South Korean teenagers believe unification is imperative — a fraction of those who believed this in their parents' and grandparents' generations.

North Korea's apocalyptic threats may only make South Koreans — and their American allies — even more doubtful that a peaceful end to this long conflict is near. But it would be a mistake to read into them anything more than the noises of a dying regime that clearly recognizes the writing on the wall.

'UN body should press China on NK defectors'



Aaron Rhodes, human rights activist

Korea Times (06.03.2013) - Aaron Rhodes, 64, a human rights activist, has criticized the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its inactivity to address North Korean human rights problems in China.

"The UNHCR is doing nothing about this problem. It'll be better being kicked out of China than staying in China without doing their job," Rhodes said in an interview.

Rhodes is a well-known figure internationally, giving a professional boost to North Korean human rights advocacy work. He is a co-founder of the Freedom Rights Project, a research project that compiles global human rights trends. Between 1993 and 2007, he was executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, during which he worked to address human rights challenges in the Balkans, Chechnya and Central Asia. In 2008, he was involved in the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, a project by the Netherlands-based non-governmental organization.

He was clear about how he wants to address human rights issues in China.

"Our focus is to bring pressure on China to change its policy, and to make it abide by the international law."

China is violating the United Nations Human Rights Convention 1951, which it signed to uphold, he said, by sending back defectors from North Korea. The convention bans the country where refugees reside from sending them back to their country of origin.

China, however, argues the defectors are temporary economic migrants in search of food and jobs. Personal testimonies and reports prove China wrong, Rhodes said.

Upon their return, the defectors are punished for crossing the border and often subjected to torture. Reports from survivors indicate many are sent to prison camps where they are physically abused and made to perform forced labor, often leading to their deaths.

What is even graver is that "between 70-80 percent of North Koreans who are forcibly repatriated by the Chinese are women," the activist said.

While in China, the women are commodities for human trafficking. They are sexually abused while in the custody of the Chinese in border prisons, Rhodes said. The same happens when they're sent back to North Korea. Sexual abuse is commonplace in prison camps and, if pregnant, the fetus may be forcibly aborted. If the baby is born, they're often murdered, with the mother watching.

Rhodes lays his hope on the United Nation process which will extensively review China's human rights record later this year, with the result due out in October. He plans to submit a report of policy recommendation, which he and his team members will be working on for the next few months.

"It will hopefully come to the attention of different governments, and the government will ask China questions about the policy, and urge them make recommendations to change," he said.

Rhodes said he knows it's not going to be easy but, "You have to do what's right."

U.N. Security Council approves new sanctions against North Korea

The Washington Post (07.03.2013) - U.N. Security Council took direct aim at North Korea's leadership Thursday with new sanctions targeting cash transfers and luxury items, punishing the reclusive regime for its latest nuclear test while evoking a fresh torrent of threats from the North Korean capital.

The sanctions, drafted by the United States and China and approved unanimously, were adopted against a backdrop of apocalyptic rhetoric from Pyongyang, including a threat to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against foreign "aggressors," a term traditionally interpreted to include the United States.

The Obama administration dismissed the threat and warned North Korea of further isolation and economic pain if it conducts more nuclear tests.

"We are fully capable of defending the United States," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters in Washington shortly after the U.N. vote.

Hours after the sanctions were approved, North Korea also said it would nullify a nonaggression agreement with South Korea and close a liaison channel along the demilitarized border that divides the two countries.

The sanctions approved by the 15-member Security Council were among the most comprehensive in recent years, as the world body acted with unanimity to denounce North Korea's third nuclear test since 2006.

The U.N. resolution imposed new restrictions on North Korean shipping firms and financial institutions and sought to block certain kinds of cash transfers frequently used by North Korean officials to obtain weapons-sensitive technology or to circumvent existing sanction law. A provision that directly targeted the North's ruling elite also tightened restrictions on overseas travel and on the importation of such luxury items as yachts, jewelry and racing cars.

The council warned of "further significant measures" if the North carried out another nuclear or ballistic missile test, a threat echoed by U.S. officials and diplomats. "Taken together, these sanctions will bite, and bite hard," Susan E. Rice, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said after the vote.

China's prominent role in drafting the measures highlighted the growing isolation of the hermetic Stalinist state, long regarded as a close ally of Beijing. China's U.N. envoy, Li Baodong, described the vote as one step in a "hard, tedious" journey to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. He said his government hopes the international community will now pursue talks with Pyongyang.

"The adoption of the resolution is not for the sake of sanctions," Li said after the vote. "The top priority now is to defuse the tension, bring down the heat, focus on [the] diplomatic track."

There were no conciliatory signs from Pyongyang. Instead, in the hours before the vote, the North increased its bluster, issuing taunts and threats that were shrill even by North Korean standards.

A Foreign Ministry statement published by Pyongyang's news agency decried the new sanctions as part of a U.S.-led "war of aggression," vowing that the North would respond with a display of "the might it built up decades after decades, and put an end to the evil

cycle of tension." The statement further warned that Pyongyang would exercise its right for "a preemptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors."

White House spokesman Jay Carney dismissed the threat, citing improved U.S. missile-defense capabilities against the "limited ballistic missile threats" that might emanate from North Korea in the coming years.

"Let us be clear: We are fully capable of dealing with that threat," Carney said.

On Capitol Hill, Glyn T. Davies, the State Department's special representative for North Korean policy, said Pyongyang's recent nuclear test was the latest in a series of provocations that demanded a firm global response.

"North Korea's [weapons of mass destruction], ballistic missile, conventional arms and proliferation activities constitute a serious and unacceptable threat to U.S. national security," Davies said in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"The leadership in Pyongyang faces sharp choices," Davies said, "and we are working to further sharpen those choices."

Seoul supports UN probe of North Korean human rights abuses

South Korea's new president reverses pledges of softer line on Pyongyang, damaging chances of closer engagement

The Guardian (05.03.2013) - [South Korea's](#) decision to support a [United Nations](#) investigation into human rights abuses by [North Korea](#) signals that Seoul's new conservative administration is willing to pressure its neighbour on such issues – even if it hurts the chances for engagement.

South Korea's pledge last week to give "active" support to the investigation came just two days after the inauguration of President Park Geun-hye and is likely to infuriate the North, which views discussion of its human rights as a "grave violation". Seoul struggled with the decision, which forced a choice between two key goals: restoring civil relations with Pyongyang, and pressing its government to improve the treatment of its 24 million people.

The South's commitment, announced by Seoul's deputy foreign minister for global affairs at a UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, is significant because the South has influence over global policymaking on North Korea. With South Korea's support, the investigation is all but assured of passage when the resolution is put up for a vote next month among member states of the Human Rights Council, rights advocates say.

The minister, Kim Bong-hyun, said conditions in North Korea have "continued to deteriorate", according to a release from Seoul's ministry of foreign affairs and trade. South Korea has typically kept quiet about the North's rights abuses, to the frustration of more than 20,000 defectors who live in the South. That changed somewhat in the last five years under former president Lee Myung-bak, but Lee faced consequences for his harder-linestance, with Pyongyang twice launching fatal attacks on the South.

On the campaign trail, Park had vowed to soften policy toward the North, raising the prospect of limited economic engagement and meetings between officials from Seoul and Pyongyang. Such ties had been severed under Lee. Many activists had presumed that

South Korea's government would not publicly back the so-called Commission of Inquiry (COI), and would instead signal its support in unpublicised meetings with other member nations, and then vote "yes". The US and Japan have also said they are in favour of the probe. The COI, if it wins majority approval from the 47 council member nations, would mark a major shift in attention paid to human rights in North Korea by the UN, which currently has only one person, working on a voluntary basis, to document the issue.

The new UN inquiry would establish a panel of experts who would interview witnesses, document abuses and help formally establish whether the North's government is committing crimes against humanity. In January, Navi Pillay, the UN human rights chief, said in a statement that such an investigation was "long overdue", particularly because there was no sign of improvement under the third-generation leader Kim Jong-eun.

According to government documents, reports from human rights groups and survivor testimony, North Koreans have virtually no right to political or religious freedom. As many as 200,000 are in political prison camps, often sent there for activities – such as selling daily products or criticising leadership – that in most countries would be considered ordinary.

The South, rights advocates say, has particular reason for concern about how the North treats its people. Several hundred who survived the gulags now live in the South.

In addition, North Korea abducted thousands of foreigners, the majority of them South Koreans who were taken by agents of Pyongyang in the decades after a 1953 armistice was signed to end the Korean war. About 86% of those abductees were eventually returned, leaving 517 still unaccounted for, according to the Seoul-based Korea Institute for National Unification, a government-funded think tank.

South Korea dilemma over North Korea atrocities?

Democracy Digest (22.02.2013) - "The United Nations' human rights chief declared recently that the time had come for a 'long overdue' investigation into what she called unparalleled rights abuses in North Korea. The probe, unprecedented in scope, could help establish whether the North's leaders are committing crimes against humanity," the Washington Post reports:

Navi Pillay's January proposal has already drawn support from the United States. But the decision has proved sensitive in South Korea, where leaders remain divided over whether to confront the North or try to somehow reduce tensions with it, even after Pyongyang last week detonated an underground nuclear device.... Washington's decision to support the effort could prove just as important, prompting other nations, "especially those on the fence, to come forward in support of the initiative," said Roberta Cohen, co-chair of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

It remains a crime in the North to criticize the government, watch a South Korean television show or leave dust on founder Kim Il Sung's portrait. Those found guilty of crimes that Pyongyang considers grave are sent, often along with their parents and children, to prison camps in isolated mountain areas where they almost always stay for life.

For example, the Daily NK news website reported that North Koreans who failed to mourn the regime's former dictator with sufficient emotional intensity were severely punished.

Citing a North Korean source, Daily NK reported that "the authorities are handing down at least six months in a labor-training camp to anybody who didn't participate in the organized gatherings during the mourning period, or who did participate but didn't cry and didn't seem genuine."

Human rights groups have been lobbying the government in Seoul to take a stronger stance on human rights in North Korea, the Post's Chico Harlan reports:

One advocate, An Myeong-chul, secretary general of the Free the NK Gulag group, said he is compiling documents about a few individuals in the North's prison camps, based on information from relatives who have escaped to the South. The documents detail the names of those in the camps, when they were taken and by whom.

An filled out one document of his own, giving information about his mother and two siblings, who were sent to a gulag in 1994, he said, paying for the crimes of his father, who had been stealing rice and then committed suicide. An believes that his family members are still in a camp, but he isn't sure. He calls the commission of inquiry a "necessity."

"If Park Geun-hye wants to open dialogue with North Korea, accepting the COI might give the North an excuse to get upset," he said. "But South Korea should be aware: There are prisoners in there, and there are survivors here."

The new generation of defectors has been described as a "small miracle" for raising hopes for human rights in North Korea. The defectors act as a "bridge population" between the two Koreas, said Carl Gershman, president of the Washington, D.C.-based National Endowment for Democracy.

Daily NK is supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the Washington-based democracy assistance group.

Canada to support for UN investigation into crimes against humanity in North Korea

Council for Human Rights in North Korea (16.02.2013) - Canada will support an expected UN inquiry into human rights violations in North Korea, a Foreign Affairs official said Friday.

"The situation in North Korea is appalling," Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, told the House of Commons on February 15. "Some have called for a Commission of Inquiry. Canada will work with our allies to support any work that will shine light on the abusers in North Korea, and bring international pressure on this regime to give its citizens the rights they deserve."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called for a Commission of Inquiry in January, noting that some 200,000 people were suffering "unthinkable" conditions in political prison camps in North Korea, including "summary executions, rape, slave labor, and forms of collective punishment that may amount to crimes against humanity."

A formal provision calling for a UN inquiry is expected to be introduced by Japan at the UN Human Rights Council in March, and the results of the investigation could lay the groundwork for eventual prosecution of North Korean leaders at the International

Criminal Court. The U.S. will also be supporting the anticipated probe, according to a February 13 report in the Associated Press.

"We are very proud of our Canadian government for its clear stance against the human rights abuses in North Korea, and its open willingness to support any initiative to be taken against them at the UN forum," said Kyung B. Lee, president of the Toronto-based Council for Human Rights in North Korea ("HRNK Canada"). "We hope that Canada, as an international leader on human rights, will not only support but play a leading role in consensus building for any initiative put forward at the forthcoming Human Rights Council."

David Hawk, the author of *The Hidden Gulag*, and a member of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea ("ICNK"), said there is "a clear and compelling case for a detailed and in-depth UN inquiry into whether the human rights violations in North Korea constitute crimes against humanity The next, and urgent, step is for UN members states to sponsor a resolution at the March 2013 Human Rights Council requesting the High Commissioner for Human Rights to convene the inquiry."

North Korea is loosening restrictions on foreign cellphones

Global Post (21.01.2013) - Visitors can now bring their own phones into the country, the Associated Press reported. But if they try to call locals, they're out of luck, as calls between locals and foreigners are still prohibited.

Travel agency Young Pioneer Tours confirmed the news, saying they could indeed bring cellphones into the country.

"This is great news for those who use their phones as a watch, alarm and camera, or just can't stop playing angry birds," they posted online, "but of course you still won't be able to connect to the Koryolink network with your outside phone."

Previously, nearly all foreigners visiting North Korea were forced to surrender their cellphones at customs, reports GlobalPost senior correspondent for East Asia, Geoffrey Cain.

Foreigners got their phones back when they left, but Wired reported that there was often evidence they had been tampered with.

"It's a security risk, and the government would prefer that contact with the outside world stay limited," Cain said today.

"So the decision to allow tourists to bring their own phones — if true — is big news," he continued.

Nobody knows for sure what goes on in the corridors of power in North Korea, but cellphone access could indeed mean that Kim Jong-un is the Swiss-educated reformer some are saying he is.

And, of course, there's the strange timing.

When Google chairman Eric Schmidt visited the Hermit Kingdom in early January, he urged the regime to embrace technology. It's unlikely the incredibly cautious authorities would make a snap decision, but Schmidt is respected in Pyongyang and could have had some sway.

Which isn't to say North Korea is entirely in the dark when it comes to cellphones and the internet.

For a nation in such a rut of poverty, the numbers aren't so bad: Orascom, an Egyptian company that helps run the North Korean mobile service, reports having more than 1 million subscribers in a country of 23 million people.

So it's not like foreigners are bringing anything new to Pyongyang.

Foreigners allowed to bring cellphones to DPRK

China Daily (20.01.2013) - Foreigners who come to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are allowed to bring their cellphones with them starting on Jan 7, a technician with the Korean-Egyptian joint venture company Koryolink told Xinhua on Sunday.

"Just fill a registration form at the Customs with your phone's IMEI number, you can bring your own phones to DPRK," said a unnamed Egyptian technician.

"If you want to make international calls, the WCDMA 3G mobile phone owners can purchase our Koryolink SIM card, which costs 50 euro," the technician said.

For decades before, foreigners visiting the DPRK must leave their cellphones at the Customs and can pick them up on departure.

"We have tried hard to negotiate with the Korean security side, and got the approval recently," said the Egyptian, noting that "it has nothing to do with the Google trip".

In fact, foreigners still can not really use the Koryolink 3G network, with no internet access allowed yet. The Koryolink staff said that the mobile internet service for foreigners will be opened soon. "It is not a technical problem, we just wait for the DPRK authority's approval."

There are 1.8 million Koreans using 3G cellphones across the country since 2008, which supports MMS and video call. But their mobile phones can neither make international calls nor connect to the Internet. Furthermore, Koreans and Foreigners can not make calls between each other due to their SIM cards set by different segments.

Eric Schmidt's daughter lifts lid on 'very strange' North Korea

Sophie Schmidt, the teenage daughter of Google chairman Eric Schmidt has shed some light on her father's secretive trip to North Korea, in a first-hand account of the visit to a "very, very strange" country.

The Daily Telegraph (22.01.2013) - In a blog posting at the weekend titled "[It might not get weirder than this](#)", Sophie Schmidt provided a candid take on the controversial three-day trip earlier this month that was criticised by the US government.

Miss Schmidt, 19, had accompanied her father on the visit as part of a delegation led by Bill Richardson, the former US ambassador to the United Nations.

"Our trip was a mixture of highly-staged encounters, tightly-orchestrated viewings and what seemed like genuine human moments," she wrote.

"We had zero interactions with non-state-approved North Koreans and were never far from our two minders."

While much of the blog posting is taken up with the sort of observational musings common to any first-time visitor to Pyongyang, it had some interesting insights into the official side of the delegation's trip.

In particular, it fleshed out the main photo-opportunity of the entire trip when they visited an e-library at Kim Il-Sung University, and chatted with some of the 90 students working on computer consoles.

"One problem: No one was actually doing anything," Schmidt wrote.

"A few scrolled or clicked, but the rest just stared. More disturbing: when our group walked in... not one of them looked up from their desks. Not a head turn, no eye contact, no reaction to stimuli.

"They might as well have been figurines," she added.

One of the world's most isolated and censored societies, the [North](#) has a domestic Intranet service with a very limited number of users.

Analysts say access to the Internet is for the super-elite only, meaning a few hundred people or maybe 1,000 at most.

On his return, Eric Schmidt said he had told [North Korea](#) it would not develop unless it embraces Internet freedom - a prospect dismissed by most observers as inconceivable.

Sophie Schmidt's description of the "unsettling" e-library visit suggests the delegation was all too aware that it was being shown a facade.

"Did our handlers honestly think we bought it? Did they even care? Photo op and tour completed, maybe they dismantled the whole set and went home," she wrote.
