

Table of Contents

- ***Why do North Koreans workers choose to be exploited by their own state abroad?***
 - ***Co-chairs urge President Trump to include human rights in North Korea negotiations***
 - ***The exploitation of North Korean Workers in Poland raised at the European Parliament and at the OSCE***
 - ***Thousands of North Korean workers enter Russia despite U.N. ban***
 - ***A French diplomat on the frontlines in Pyongyang***
 - ***Re: North Korea human rights***
 - ***Over 1,000 North Korean workers slated for dispatch to China***
 - ***40 NGOs write to South Korean President Moon***
 - ***US sanctions N. Korean, Chinese firms aiding Pyongyang***
 - ***Russia's hidden world of North Korean labor***
 - ***Even in Poland, workers' wages flow to North Korea***
-

Why do North Koreans workers choose to be exploited by their own state abroad?

Paper presented on the occasion of the screening of "Dollar Heroes" at the European Parliament on 9 October(*)

By Eun Kyoung Kwon, Director of Open North Korea and Secretary General of ICNK

HRWF (29.10.2018) - Over 100,000 citizens of the DPRK work in about 40 countries around the world including: Mongolia, Russia, Poland, Kuwait as well as China. Cumulatively, these workers earn approximately 900 million dollars a year.

North Korean overseas workers have to submit 70% to 95% of their earnings to the authorities in the form of 'state-assigned earnings' or a 'state fee.' They work over 8 hours a day, sometimes up to 20 hours according to former North Korean overseas workers.

Why do such many North Koreans come to work in foreign countries despite the fact that around 90% of their salaries will be confiscated by the state? In order to find this answer, we must investigate the system of forced labor in the DPRK.

There is a law in North Korea which punishes the unemployed. Article 90 of the Administrative Punishment Law states that "those who do not take a job at a company where they have been dispatched to within 6 months, without fair reason, or those who do not report for duty at a company for over a month, will be sentenced to up to three months of forced labor in a labor-training camp (rodong dallyeondae). In serious cases, culprits may be sentenced to longer than three months."

The North Korean economic system is, as everybody knows, a state-planned economy where enterprises, factories, and other workplaces must operate in accordance with the state economic plan, regardless of their realistic capacity. The salary system is also included in the state plan.

In fact, the state-designated monthly wage for most employees is around 2,000 North Korean won, only enough to purchase 500 grams of rice. Therefore, many North Korean people go to their workplaces not to earn a living but to avoid punishment for the crime of unemployment. No North Korean expects to receive a living wage from their company. Perversely, North Korean companies extort money and resources from their employees. It is how and why the companies exist.

Let's imagine how the North Korean people survive with 2,000 won of monthly wage, which is equivalent to 500 grams of rice. The solution used to be the food distribution system, but now it is markets. Through producing, selling, and circulating goods privately in markets, a North Korean can earn a living wage. However, to work in markets, one must escape from duties at their assigned workplace. In order to avoid the punishment for unemployment, market operators pay monthly bribes to their employers. The amount of bribe is at over score times their monthly wage. About 30% of company employees pay bribes in order to attend to their private businesses.

These days, markets are home to thriving private businesses such as transportation, distribution, manufacturing and various other companies. But, working for these private businesses is not fully authorized as an official occupation in North Korea.

Many state-run enterprises and factories don't operate efficiently enough to make a profit, however, their role is to supervise and control employees' political beliefs. This is conducted through weekly self-criticism meetings and more than three times of political lectures for a month organized by the Workers Party committee. If an employee wants to skip such political activities, they must offer over 100,000 won per month in bribes to the company.

In addition, all workplaces are required to provide labor and resources for national construction projects. When a state-planned construction project is undertaken, employees of factories and enterprises across the country will be mobilized to provide labor for the project.

Laborers are mobilized for constructions through a systemized rotation process in a company. However, if you offer over 400,000 North Korean won a year, you can avoid the mobilization. The monthly salary is around 2,000 won.

Therefore, it is poorer employees who are most likely to be mobilized for national construction projects. For the duration of the project, they will continue to receive insignificant remuneration from their companies but, more damagingly, be deprived of the opportunity to earn money through market activities for the entire duration of the construction project. There is no additional compensation.

In terms of resources for the construction, enterprises have to provide most of the construction materials, with the authorities only supplying cement, sand, and gasoline. The remaining necessary materials are the responsibility of the local employees to provide.

Since Chairman Kim Jong Un took office, the state has been actively pursuing construction projects. In Pyongyang, they built Scientists Street, Changkwang Street, and Ryeomyung Street and, in the northern city of Hyesan and Chongjin, new apartment complexes, and a few tourist resorts in a coastal city. For these projects, authorities do

not appropriate a budget for labor and most construction materials, as they are the responsibility of enterprises and their employees.

There is another forced labor system, which is used also for major national construction projects and can be considered a contemporary form of a slavery. It is the permanent *dolgyeokdae*, a shock brigade or a military-style construction youth brigade. It is set up as a supplementary military service, but designed for meeting the labor needs of national construction projects.

The structure and management of this *dolgyeokdae* brigade are almost the same as that of the People's Army. The *dolgyeokdae* is a formal alternative to military service, with a service period of seven years, as opposed to 10 year service period for the army.

Technically, members of *dolgyeokdae* receive a salary, though it is around one third of normal workers' salaries. However, of the 30 former *dolgyeokdae* members I have met in South Korea, none received salaries during their service, for almost ten years.

Due to the dire working situation and high intensity labor requirement, only the most vulnerable class of people are dispatched to *dolgyeokdae* after their graduation from high school.

To summarize, a workplace of North Korean workers exists not to provide for the economic lives of employees but to extort money, resources and labor from employees and control their political lives and ideological beliefs. These are ordinary practices for North Korean workers, including those who work in foreign countries.

North Korean workers in foreign countries can pick up construction contracts as a second job after work and during the weekends. Experienced engineers can even leave their own workplace to work contract jobs. Like in North Korea, however, they must pay massive bribes to managers in order to leave their workplace during the daytime.

This system puts double or triple burden of labor on shoulders of N. Korean workers both in the country and foreign countries. To bring an end to forced labor, the North Korean government must decriminalize unemployment, recognize private businesses as a legally valid profession to allow citizens to earn a living privately, and importantly dismantle the *dolgyeokdae* system in the long run.

There is one additional point that I'd like to speak on.

While the money that North Koreans earn overseas makes its way into state coffers, the little money that they earn through contract jobs functions as a driving force for vitalization of markets and has a stabilizing effect on people lives.

I don't expect North Koreans to return to the dire situation while operating a strict state-planned economy as they suffered until the early 1990s. We expect people's economic activities in markets to become more vitalized and to bring comparative stability to their lives. (It is one of a few solutions for human rights improvement in the DPRK.) (As the human rights situation improves, the path for normalization of the country will become clearer.)

If North Korea follows through on promises of complete denuclearization, Kim Jong Un will expect economic development with much international support in near future. This support should be given for the sake of the people's betterment and the international community must make it clear that forced labor cannot be involved in any way and that all laborers must be compensated with a fair salary and work in enhanced working conditions.

The 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review is coming in May next year. I hope the stakeholders and relevant officials at the EU accept my suggestions for your recommendations to the DPRK, so that North Korea can implement practical solutions to end the forced labor.

() The conference and screening of the movie "Dollar Heroes" had been organized at the European Parliament by MEP Laszlo Tokes with Human Rights Without Frontiers.*

Co-chairs urge President Trump to include human rights in North Korea negotiations

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (16.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2pVi6GI> - Reps. Randy Hultgren (R-IL) and Jim McGovern (D-MA), Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, wrote to President Donald Trump on the strategic importance of incorporating human rights indicators into the Administration's ongoing denuclearization talks with North Korea. To further this objective, the Co-Chairs also urged the President to appoint a Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues as provided for in the North Korea Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2017. The letter follows a September hearing convened by the Commission on human rights in North Korea. The full text of the letter is below.

The bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 by unanimous consent in the United States House of Representatives to promote, defend and advocate for international human rights. The Commission undertakes public education activities, provides expert human rights advice and encourages Members of Congress to actively engage in human rights issues.

Dear Mr. President:

We commend your recent efforts to ensure North Korean denuclearization. A wholly denuclearized North Korea is imperative for the preservation of American safety and security and that of regional allies. To that end, the incorporation of human rights indicators into a credible, verifiable denuclearization deal with North Korea is strategic and could facilitate the long-term success of such an agreement.

At a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing last month, security and human rights experts testified about how to raise human rights objectives in negotiations with North Korea and incorporate them as criteria for improved relations between our two nations. North Korea's steps to address human rights would demonstrate trustworthiness in negotiations with the United States. Follow-through on concrete human rights commitments would lend credibility to North Korea's security commitments in a variety of ways.

As a first step, we urge you to appoint the Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights Issues provided for in the North Korea Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2017. A Special Envoy with appropriate expertise on both human rights and national security

could provide valuable insight for your administration and could engage directly with the North Korean government on improving human rights conditions.

Second, we recommend including several specific human rights issues and appropriate indicators in your negotiations with North Korea as a measure of good faith. A primary concern is the protection of American citizens who visit North Korea. The North Korean regime's treatment of individual Americans demonstrates a disregard for the safety of the American people and a lack of respect for our nation as a whole. Ensuring necessary protections for American visitors would facilitate increased travel and information sharing between the people of both nations.

Facilitating family reunions for Korean Americans who have long been separated from their relatives in the North would also contribute to increased interactions between North Koreans and the outside world. Reunions should not take place solely in North Korea but should be available to all via a transparent process facilitated by the existence of open and ongoing lines of communication between separated families.

North Korea's verified compliance with international standards for humanitarian aid would provide reassurance as to the appropriate use of United States funds to North Korea and ensure that resources are reaching those who are in greatest need. The illicit diversion of food and aid to the military and the political elite exemplifies the defiant behavior of North Korea. Humanitarian workers must have access and be able to verify that aid reaches those for whom it was intended, including those held in prison and labor camps.

Revenue derived from the export of slave labor and exploitation of labor camps is used to enrich the North Korean government, which reportedly continues to develop military and nuclear capabilities. Verifiable steps to abolish forced labor and human trafficking would directly impact illicit funding sources for North Korea's aggressive military posture.

Lastly, the United States should pursue the termination of North Korea's information blockade against independent media outlets. Recommended actions could include permitting radio broadcasts or other messaging to provide people with useful ways to address problems they face in business, private markets, and agriculture along with information about individual universal freedoms.

In support of these recommendations, we also urge your administration to ensure that this year's United Nations General Assembly resolution on human rights in North Korea maintains the strength and resolve of last year's statement. A Security Council meeting on human rights in North Korea should also be held to continue to highlight the direct ways human rights are linked to security in this situation.

We also strongly urge you to work with the Chinese government to ensure that North Korean refugees are not forcibly repatriated.

As you made clear in your 2018 State of the Union Address, "No regime has oppressed its own citizens more totally or brutally than the cruel dictatorship of North Korea." In this spirit, we encourage the timely appointment of the Special Envoy so that human rights can be incorporated into denuclearization talks in a way that is both strategic for their success and reflects the universal freedoms that are accorded to all people.

Sincerely,

Randy Hultgren, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC

James P. McGovern, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC

Cc: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State
The Honorable Nikki Haley, United States Ambassador to the United Nations

The exploitation of North Korean Workers in Poland raised at the European Parliament and at the OSCE

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (09.10.2018) – Today, MEP Laszlo Tökes and *Human Rights Without Frontiers* organized the screening of a film dealing with the exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland despite the UN and EU sanctions forbidding the hiring of workforce from North Korea. With the complicity of private companies and Polish state agencies, North Korean workers continue to work in Poland and to be exploited by Pyongyang, left only with an income of less than USD 150 per month.

On 19 September last, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* made a public statement at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) of the OSCE/ODIHR in Warsaw asking the Polish delegation to the OSCE “How many North Korean Workers are currently working in Poland, and how many work visas have been issued since the last HDIM?” (1)

Poland exercised his right of reply and gave again conflicting statistics.

Last official statistics revealed by Poland

In its oral right of reply limited to one minute, the delegation answered there were still “circa 350 DPRK citizens with the purpose of stay in Poland whilst to perform work. This number is constantly decreasing. And moreover it is important to reiterate that in 2016 and 2017 Poland did not issue any work visas to North Korean citizens - as visas on the one hand and permits of stay and work on the other are different titles of stay.”

In its full official right of reply publicized on the website of the OSCE/ ODIHR, the answer of the Polish delegation was however different (2):

I would like to exercise my right of reply in regard to the statement delivered by the Human Rights Without Frontiers.

The Polish government does not take an active part in the process of hiring North Korean workers nor does it promote such practices. The existing cooperation is based on private companies’ independent agreements.

The government institutions, such as the National Labour Inspectorate and the Border Guard, oversee the DPRK nationals’ employment conditions and ensure the Polish laws are respected in their workplace. To that end, these institutions regularly inspect the companies where DPRK nationals are employed. Inspections

performed by the above-mentioned institutions did not confirm any cases of forced labour related to North-Korean workers in Poland.

Poland, similarly to other EU countries, did not have systemic solutions prohibiting North Korean citizens (or citizens from any other country) to take up work in Poland before the adoption of UN resolutions 2371 and 2375. In this view a general ban on entering Poland and taking up work for specific nationalities would be discriminating.

We welcomed the UN resolutions 2371 and 2375 adopted in this regard as providing the international community with adequate tools related to issue of the DPRK workers. In order to exercise these resolutions we stopped the issuance of new work permits to DPRK workers since August 2017. The related laws regulating access to labour market have been amended in order to find a solution to the problem. The necessary amendments have entered into force on February 2018.

Poland also strives to implement the provisions of the UN resolution No. 2397 that will enable return of DPRK workers to their country.

We estimate that as of September 2018 there were 225 DPRK citizens, whose purpose of stay in Poland was to perform work. This number is constantly decreasing. To actively implement the resolution's provisions, we have begun to withdraw residence permits granted in previous years to DPRK nationals. By mid-September 2018, decisions revoking 250 DPRK citizens' work authorizations had been taken. We can say that we are ahead of schedule – more than half of the DPRK citizens present in Poland at the time of the adoption of the UNSCR 2397 have already returned to the DPRK.

Moreover, it is important to reiterate that in 2017 and 2016 Poland did not issue any work visas to North Korean citizens – as was stressed by our delegation previously. It is important to underline that according to the Polish law, the visas issued by consuls of the Republic of Poland on the one hand, and residence permits issued by regional governor's offices on the other are different titles of stay.

We are also pleased to inform that the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Poland in Vienna remains in contact with the representatives of the Human Rights Without Frontiers in regard to this topic.

A brief analysis of the official position of the Polish delegation suffices to highlight the incoherence and contradictions of the reply:

- Poland does take an active part in the process of hiring North Korean workers as for decades, including in the last few years and despite the UN and EU sanctions, it has granted North Korean citizens visas allowing them to work on its territory.
- The assertion that since 2016 Poland has not delivered new visas allowing North Korean citizens to work is vigorously contested by journalists of Vice (3) and of The New York Times (4). Moreover, the Polish delegation contradicts itself in its right of reply as it says "we stopped the issuance of new work permits to DPRK workers since August 2017" but says afterwards "in 2017 and 2016 Poland did not issue any work visas to North Korean citizens – as was stressed by our delegation previously."

- Poland, as a state, denies hiring North Korean laborers but tolerates Pyongyang's exploitation system of its citizens and makes itself an accomplice of it.
- Poland states that the National Labor Inspection did not detect any case of forced labor but we never said in our statement that North Korean workers were victims of forced labor. The issue is that Poland turns a blind eye to the sophisticated system of exploitation of North Korean workers put in place on the Polish territory by Pyongyang. Moreover, Vice journalists have highlighted the complicity of some labor inspection actors in the exploitation system.
- Before the UN and EU ban on hiring North Korean workers, some other EU member states such as the Czech Republic or The Netherlands immediately felt morally obliged to stop granting them working visas and to put an end to their activities when they were informed about the exploitation system. Poland did not feel morally obliged to do so and still does not. When Poland uses the argument that "a general ban on entering Poland and taking up work for specific nationalities would be discriminating", its answer is biased and suggests that UN and EU sanctions would be discriminatory...
- Last but not least, the Polish delegation says in its official written reply this year that "as of September 2018 there were 225 DPRK citizens, whose purpose of stay in Poland was to perform work" while in its official oral answer as video-recorded by the OSCE, it says that "there were circa 350 DPRK citizens with the purpose of stay in Poland whilst to perform work."

Our 'dialogue' with the Polish authorities on this issue will continue so that UN and EU sanctions become a full reality in Poland as soon as possible but in fact Poland does not seem to know how many North Korean workers are really employed on its territory. In the last three years, many contradictions and counter-arguments concerning their statistics have been highlighted by various researchers and investigators.

Poland's past official statistics rejected by various researchers and investigators

In September 2016, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* asked the Polish delegation to the OSCE how many North Koreans were working in Poland (5). The official answer was "about 550". In September 2017, we again asked the same question (6). The answer this time was approximately 400. The Polish authorities claimed that they did not issue new work visas in the last two years (2016 and 2017), yet this was contested by Prof. Remco Breuker from the University of Leiden who published a 115-page report entitled "North Korean Forced Labour in the EU: the Polish Case." (7)

These questions were raised again on 31 December 2017 by *The New York Times* in an article by Peter S. Goodman, Choe Sang-Hun and Joanna Berendt entitled "Even in Poland, workers' wages flow to North Korea" (8). As the article recounts:

At an isolated shipyard on Poland's Baltic coast, men in coveralls used welding torches under a cold drizzle, forging an oil tanker for a customer in the Netherlands. The scene was unremarkable, save for the provenance of a dozen of the workers

"Yes, we are from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," one of them said. "We have been here quite a while. Then he hurried away, alarm seizing his face."

The New York Times found North Korean workers at a shipyard near the German border and at Remprodex, a manufacturer of shipping containers in the nearby town of Czluchow, 100 miles southwest of Gdansk; The workers said they had arrived in Poland in early 2017.

According to the American newspaper, the State Labor Inspectorate, which regulates working conditions at Polish companies, said that, as of mid-2017, some 450 North Koreans remained in the country, employed by at least 19 companies, including a complex of greenhouses growing tomatoes south of Warsaw.

In Poland, provincial governments issue work permits to foreign laborers, and there is little coordination with national agencies. As a result, no one appears to know precisely how many North Koreans are in Poland or what they are doing, *The New York Times* reported.

The New York Times furthermore requested information on work permits issued to North Koreans from Poland's 16 provincial governments. There were nine responses that disclosed, in total, 124 new permits issued in 2017 and 253 granted in 2016. These numbers clearly contradict the official responses from the Polish authorities.

The statistics provided by various Polish authorities are therefore confusing and unreliable.

According to the official website of the Polish ministry in charge of the issuance of work permits, 299 North Korean citizens applied for a work permit in 2016 and Poland granted it to 187 of them. These figures contradict the answer of Poland's Delegation to the OSCE who said among other things at the HDIM in 2017 that

there are no more than 550 North Korean workers in Poland. Under the existing laws, all visa applications continue to be reviewed on a case by case basis. We would like to stress that in 2016 Poland has not issued any work visas for DPRK's nationals. In 2015 we issued only 129 such visas.

Moreover, in an email dated 19 May 2017, the Polish delegation to the OSCE told *Human Rights Without Frontiers* that the number of North Korean workers in Poland as of 1 January 2017 was estimated at around 400 persons and no visas were issued in 2016.

Recommendations

Considering that the UN Security Council voted unanimously to impose strict sanctions on North Korea in order to prevent Pyongyang from acquiring hard currencies, including through its overseas workers,

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* calls again this year upon the Polish state**

- to publicize accurate and reliable statistics concerning the number of North Korean workers still employed in Poland;
- to abide by the UN and EU sanctions;
- to abide by International Labour Organization standards;
- to stop granting new work visas to North Korean workers;

- to give a date by which the employment of North Korean workers in Poland will end.

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the OSCE to collect data from its Participating States regarding the issuance of work visas to North Korean citizens and the status of their workplace conditions; Russia is still hiring North Korean workers at an alarming rate, according to a recent report of the South Korean NGO, North Korea Database (NKDB).

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the European Commission to start a full investigation on the situation in Poland and then, if necessary, to move on to the next level and start an infringement procedure against Poland in line with the legal avenues at its disposal.

Footnotes

(1) Oral statement (Video)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/13e4AECu6Ejb0djJ_BRierLJNqhsUpMuB/view

Written statement

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/396293?download=true>

(2) <https://www.osce.org/odihr/397718?download=true>

(3) An exceptional 32-minute investigation video report made by Polish journalists about the exploitation of North Korean workers in Poland is available online at the following web addresses: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNVCdL908ko> (Sub-titles in English and French) <http://www.vice.com/nl/video/cash-for-kim-de-noord-koreaanse-dwangarbeiders-diezich-doodwerken-in-polen-293> (German) More reports about North Korea's involvement can be found at the following web address: <http://www.vice.com/nl/tag/Noord-Korea> (Dutch)

(4) <http://nyti.ms/2lJiJ3H>

(5) <https://www.osce.org/odihr/266761?download=true>

(6) <https://www.osce.org/odihr/342706?download=true>

(7) Report: <http://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/rapport-slaves.pdf>

Statistics from the official Polish website

<https://www.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/cudzoziemcy-pracujacy-w-polsce-statystyki/>

(8) See footnote 4.

Additional reading

Also see the HRWF Report presented at the European Parliament in 2014: North Korean Overseas Workers - Human Rights Challenges and Opportunities

<http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2014-North-Korea-Overseas-Workers.pdf>

Thousands of North Korean workers enter Russia despite U.N. ban

Moscow's approval of new North Korean laborers keeps cash flowing to Pyongyang and may violate sanctions, U.S. officials say

By Ian Talley in Washington and

Anatoly Kurmanaev in St. Petersburg, Russia

WJS (02.08.2018) - <https://on.wsj.com/2ny2sQn> - Russia is letting thousands of new North Korean laborers enter the country and issuing fresh work permits—actions U.S. officials say potentially violate United Nations sanctions aimed at cutting cash flows to Pyongyang and pressing it to give up nuclear weapons.

The U.N. Security Council in September barred governments from issuing new work permits to North Koreans, though some existing labor contracts were allowed to continue.

Since the ban, more than 10,000 new North Korean workers have registered in Russia, according to Russian Interior Ministry records reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. Meanwhile, at least 700 new work permits have been issued to North Koreans this year, according to Labor Ministry records.

The labor prohibition, part of a broad array of sanctions, is aimed at eliminating an important revenue stream for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's regime. Most of the money North Koreans earn abroad ends up in government coffers, U.S. and U.N. officials say. Often, workers toil in grueling conditions.

Russian government records also show that some companies hiring North Koreans are joint ventures with North Korean entities, an apparent violation of sanctions banning "all joint ventures or cooperative entities" with North Korean companies and citizens. Many of the companies appear to be expanding even as they are supposed to be scaling down.

While sanctions have reduced North Korea's total labor force overseas, a U.S. official said, those numbers haven't fallen in Russia and China. "We don't want to underestimate the extent to which there may be serious violations."

U.N. officials are probing potential violations of the sanctions, which contain narrow exceptions, according to people familiar with the matter. Russia's Interior and Foreign ministries didn't respond to requests for comment. In the past, the Foreign Ministry has said it accepted the U.N. sanctions.

Efforts to reach North Korea's embassy in Moscow were unsuccessful. A man who answered the phone at North Korea's mission to the U.N. in Geneva said he had no knowledge of the matter.

China and Russia have drawn U.S. ire in recent months, accused by Washington of allowing North Korean illicit activity and sanctions evasion. Chinese and Russian firms continue to help the pariah nation import oil products in excess of U.N.-mandated caps, including through previously sanctioned tankers, according to U.S. and U.N. officials and a declassified intelligence briefing prepared for the U.N.'s committee on North Korea sanctions and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

North Korean laborers have helped feed the construction boom in St. Petersburg, according to local businessmen.

"They work till they drop," said a contractor who hires North Koreans across the city. Workers arrive at construction sites at 7 a.m. and work until 10 p.m. or even midnight, taking just two half-hour breaks for meals of rice and dried fish, he said.

Local developers say they pay companies that hire out North Korean workers—firms they say often represent North Korean institutions such as the military or state conglomerates—about 100,000 rubles (\$1,600) a month per worker. In government

filings and job advertisements, such companies list monthly worker salaries of 16,000 to 20,000 rubles.

That 80% difference is in line with U.S. assessments that North Korea's government takes the bulk of earnings.

U.N. sanctions mean these laborers should be gone by September, a year after they went into effect, because the workers are required to leave once their permits expire, usually within a year. Even workers with multiyear permits must be out by the end of 2019 under the sanctions.

Yet many firms contracting out laborers—Russian companies owned and run by North Koreans, according to corporate documents and researchers—are investing in new offices, applying for new work permits and negotiating new projects.

"The Kim regime continues to dispatch citizens abroad," said C4ADS, a nonprofit that advises the U.S. government on security risks, in a report released Thursday. "In doing so, it continues to flout international sanctions to generate foreign currency."

About 100,000 or more North Korean laborers have been working overseas in recent years, the U.S. State Department said. Pyongyang's labor exports earned as much as \$2 billion a year for the Kim regime, analysts say.

According to Russian government data, around 24,000 North Koreans were officially working in the country at the end of last year.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the U.S. envoy to the U.N., Nikki Haley, said recently that while Russia has helped pass North Korean sanctions, they questioned Moscow's enforcement.

"We're going to demand that every country in the world do their part," Mr. Pompeo said.

Kuwait, Poland and other countries have said they have stopped renewing North Korean worker visas. The clampdown, along with other sanctions, is credited by U.S. officials with helping compel Mr. Kim to start denuclearization talks.

C4ADS has mapped out networks of firms and individuals using North Korean workers, mainly in Russia and China. Cross-referencing corporate registry documents, official labor statistics, tax filings and trade records, C4ADS said many firms contracting North Korean laborers from St. Petersburg to Siberia appear to violate sanctions.

One such company identified by C4ADS and examined by the Journal is Sakorenma Ltd., which has employed North Korean workers since at least 2015 and whose ownership structure appears to put it in breach of U.N. sanctions.

According to Russian corporate documents, one of its owners is North Korea's General Corporation for External Construction, or Genco. The U.S. sanctioned the firm in 2016 for employing North Korean labor overseas, alleging that some Genco revenues are funneled into Pyongyang's Munitions Industry Department, which supports Mr. Kim's weapons programs.

Local Russian authorities on Sakhalin Island awarded this year Sakorenma two contracts valued at a total of \$180,000, according to public records.

Sakorenma and Genco didn't respond to requests for comment.

Genco appears to operate elsewhere in Russia through firms with similar names, C4ADS

said. Some of those firms are seeking new permits for North Korean laborers, according to records reviewed by the Journal.

Zenco-39, a firm based in Krasnodar that was approved to hire 1,550 North Korean workers over the past three years, posted ads in late July seeking Korean translators. In Russia, companies must post jobs to see if locals are available before applying for permits for foreigners.

That firm was linked through C4ADS's research to more than half a dozen others using the same email address, physical addresses, directors or corporate names.

Another company, agriculture giant Yuzhny-Agrokombinat, obtained authorizations to hire 91 North Korean vegetable growers this year, according to Russian Labor Ministry data. The company is owned by Russian billionaire Vladimir Evtushenkov.

A spokesman for Mr. Evtushenkov's holding company, Sistema Financial Corp. , said the vegetable company's North Korean workers were hired before the U.N. ban in September 2017 and fully comply with Russian law. He said the company doesn't plan to hire any new North Korean workers.

In St. Petersburg, the Journal reviewed copies of new work permits issued by local authorities to North Korean workers as recently as June. Those hires aren't reflected in Labor Ministry data, which indicate there were no applications for North Korean work permits in the city or surrounding region this year.

Three of the firms that received local permits—Mokran Ltd., Bu Khyn Ltd. and Kanson Ltd.—list addresses in a warehouse inside a dilapidated industrial estate south of the city center.

Neighboring businesses said the firms have been upgrading the facility. Several sought Korean-speaking translators in job postings in February and again in July.

When contacted about the positions, representatives said they were filled. Other calls to the companies went unanswered.

Some real-estate companies say they are aware of sanctions and are gradually winding down use of North Korean labor. But they said they were given no guidance by the government. Some plan to keep using the workers until the next decade, hoping Mr. Kim's promise to end weapons programs will lead to relaxed sanctions.

"They are like soldiers. They've got the discipline," said an executive at a large real-estate firm in St. Petersburg. "We want to keep working with them."

A French diplomat on the frontlines in Pyongyang

Olivier Vaysset talks running the French Cooperation Office in the DPRK from 2011-13

By Hamish Macdonald

NK News.org (08.06.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2sHLbHL> - In October of 2011, the French Cooperation Office began operating in Pyongyang, North Korea. While maintaining that it had no diplomatic relations with the DPRK, Paris sent diplomat Olivier Vaysset to run the office.

Vaysset, a diplomat with previous postings in Angola, Laos, Japan, Burma, Taiwan and Singapore, was in the country between October 9 2011 and November 1 2013.

The period represented a critical time for the DPRK. Just one month after Vaysset's arrival North Korea announced that its then-leader – Kim Jong Il – had passed away, with currently leader Kim Jong Un ascending to power.

And in February 2013, North Korea also conducted its third underground nuclear test leading to a period of extreme tensions on the peninsula.

Vaysset spoke to NK News about his time and experiences in Pyongyang at this important juncture.

NK News: As head of the French Cooperation Bureau in Pyongyang what was your mission and your day-to-day tasks on the ground in the DPRK?

Olivier Vaysset: I had to set up the office within the German campus in one of the abandoned spaces left after German reunification. It took me two years to set up an operational office sufficient to our diplomatic work, with the help of the North Korean authorities.

At the same time, I had to follow the political and security situation in the Korean peninsula, to manage our bilateral academic and linguistic cooperation and our cultural and research cooperation and, finally, for the priority missions, to monitor the action of French NGOs and that of EU food aid in coordination with UN agencies, and to relay France's serious concerns about the human rights situation.

Other missions included conveying to the North Korean authorities France's commitment to press Pyongyang to scale down its nuclear and ballistic programs and analyzing the Party rhetoric in an attempt to understand the authorities' policy on this matters.

And, finally, during any visits by French businessmen, to emphasize the constraints of bilateral economic relations as set forth in UN and European sanctions.

While such tasks hardly constituted a "routine" in such a context, it was important to strive for regularity so as to maintain one's mental equilibrium while furthering an understanding of one's environment.

My daily tasks consisted of studying the Party journal with my liaison officer and delving deeper into important topics; reading KCNA, newspapers, magazines and specialized sites about the region; keeping up with UN agency reports; participating in weekly meeting of EU Heads of Mission and the one organized by the WFP.

I also had to read my French colleague's notes and report back to Paris on the results of my contacts and reading... Not to mention all the administrative work to be done by only two Frenchmen plus a minder and a driver.

NK News: You arrived in Pyongyang at a crucial time – just before Kim Jong Il died. What was the atmosphere like in the city at the time and in 2012 under the new leadership?

Olivier Vaysset: Arriving two and a half months before the sudden death of Kim Jong Il, I felt like I had taken a machine back in time to the post-Korean War years and had to adapt to a past, somewhat static time.

Very quickly the brutal news of the death of the country's father-mother was followed by the raw expression of pain and anxiety by the population. Nothing surprising when you

know the Korean emotional tradition and the grip this one man had on the daily lives of the North Korean people.

Just as brutally, within a few weeks, the population had to rejoice to see the son following the father's path.

Within a few months, Pyongyang changed its face from cold austerity to a city with new towers, restaurants, cafes, nightclubs, markets and shopping malls. The most impressive thing was the exponential increase in cars – and not the cheapest ones – and the onset of traffic jams, a real challenge for the female traffic officers who had never experienced such a flow of vehicles.

It was a whole new message: you are authorized to flaunt your wealth and enjoy your life in a great city; a city embellished with modern towers, theme parks, ice skating rinks, an aquarium and much more to come. And a promise: you will not have to tighten your belt anymore.

NK News: You were also there in 2013 when tensions were exceptionally high. What was the atmosphere like then and did you get the sense that North Koreans believed there was the danger of conflict starting?

Olivier Vaysset: This was a situation of great confusion due to many factors: a message that was meant to be clear and imperative did not go well through the foreign ministry. The Ministry of Defense took over to reduce the prospect of a serious conflict. When the authorities said they could not protect us in the event of an imminent conflict, we were advised to leave or to go to distant shelters (but without further details).

The authorities told us that the people's pursuit of daily activities demonstrated their courage and faith in a final victory. However, Pyongyang's population had undergone emergency training in case of alerts. Our local contacts seemed to be waiting for clarification and our Chinese and Russian friends were dubious. So the situation in Pyongyang was in sharp contrast with the situation in Seoul, where a number of foreigners had bought plane tickets and packed their bags.

The biggest challenge for the EU Heads of Mission was to lower the pressure coming from our media-fueled capitals; every journalist was so excited to be at the front line of a great conflict... Albeit with no time to report and perhaps no living readers.

NK News: You were posted in the DPRK for over two years. What were the biggest or most significant changes you observed as having occurred throughout your time in the country?

Olivier Vaysset: As I said before, the changing face of Pyongyang. But also a young leader who carried some hope for the people and who wanted to show some kind of modern behavior with his wife and the famous "Moranbong" all-girls band.

Another significant change consisted of the relative relaxation of the Pyongyang citizens even when pushed to do Herculean works for the masses and participation in great festivities remain de rigueur, but something one feels more over time is the general complexification of society following the destructuring of the system caused by the famine: the creation of an autonomous private market, tolerated and repressed according to unknown, ever-changing norms.

NK News: Where you able to travel outside of Pyongyang with any regularity and which locations were you able to visit?

Olivier Vaysset: One doesn't need permission for a day trip outside Pyongyang, and one can drive one's own car as far as the western port of Nampo. In 30 minutes by car from home, you will find yourself in another world, somewhere between poverty and very modest means.

I've been to all North Korean provinces except for Chagang and Ryanggang. I visited French and German NGO projects and the UN projects. We were invited to go to Rason by train for the inauguration of the section of railway from the Russian border to the port of Rajin. I know the western coast too, where expats go to relax.

I was quite surprised by the number of historical sites and temples which are still standing in some parts of the country. I went down to the DMZ and Kaesong industrial zone and up to Dandong.

NK News: While in Pyongyang, were there strict limits on where you could go around the city? Were you able to access some of the markets there?

Olivier Vaysset: Except for the "forbidden city" and military installations, I was able to walk all over Pyongyang, which I did every weekend to get a feel of the city. One can see small shops and people selling food at their window or in the street. The famous Tongil market is easily accessible – even though you need local currency to buy anything.

All in all, to insist that Pyongyang is only a "showcase" city is to miss a good part of the reality there. It takes time to go beyond the big avenues to perceive and see the view from the ground, literally by the soles of one's shoes.

NK News: Humanitarian cooperation was a key element of the Bureau's mission when it was set up. Was the Bureau able to make a positive impact in this area and what were the biggest impediments you observed to better humanitarian conditions in the DPRK?

Olivier Vaysset: Very few NGOs decided to stay under the new strict regulations and tough constraints. They were brought under a new appellation "European Union Program Support Units" (EUPS).

I do not know who gave instructions to the "Korean European Cooperation Coordination Agency" (KECCA) but she was the voice of the severe obstacles that NGOs face. NGOs, unlike UN agencies, have no political relay to have their voice heard, hence my role to defend and support French NGOs with the help of the Ambassador of Sweden.

"General winter" is another obstacle.

More impediments came from American sanctions. Since 2013, banking channels were regularly disrupted, with humanitarian organizations unable to transfer funds into the country. They also faced delays in procurement, additional requirements for licensing, and ensuring equipment or supplies were not on the sanctions list.

But if political reasons and national pride can explain the North Korean constraints, the political debate in the West seems to me unhealthy and excessive. Some people are ready to let the population die in the name of "humanitarian purity" and bet on a general revolt of a hungry population. And if this scenario doesn't work then we resort to the nuclear final solution.

Quite seriously, I am impressed by these young Europeans' commitment who work under such conditions and arrive at highly credible results for the benefit of vulnerable groups. We must trust them.

NK News: What was your sense of how your DPRK counterparts saw their country's relationship with France? Did they deem it important to strengthen ties?

Olivier Vaysset: The North Korean authorities welcomed the opening of the French office, which they saw as the last stage before the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. The 1981 visit of future-President Mitterrand to Pyongyang who was received by Kim Il Sung made them believe in a commitment on his part in this direction. Eventually, we were only one of two EU member states to stay away from establishing diplomatic relations.

Other reasons were France's image as the country of the Revolution and of General de Gaulle, hero of the Resistance to the invader, and France's policy of national independence, sovereignty and nuclear power. France being a permanent member of the UN Security Council helped too. Hence North Korea's high expectation of France.

NK News: Amid the diplomatic progress seen since the beginning of 2018, it has been proposed in some quarters that the U.S. could operate a liaison office in Pyongyang as a step towards normalizing U.S.-DPRK ties. Having come from such an office, how would you see such a step taken by the U.S. and does it have the potential – if realized – to have a large impact?

Olivier Vaysset: Difficult to answer, although France did participate in the UN forces during the Korean War. And we authorized a DPRK office in Paris since 1969 more or less integrated within the DPRK mission to UNESCO.

I think it's essential to be there in order to dispel fantasies and assumptions and to have daily physical contact with the country and its people. One must remain open and work patiently without moralizing or expecting immediate results. Americans would run the risk of exasperating their host and being pushed out.

I would rather see a small U.S. mission for diplomatic and humanitarian tasks with instructions not to try to play smart and not to reject the experiences of their colleagues and foreign aid workers. Modesty would have the most impact.

NK News: For you personally, what was it like residing in Pyongyang? What were the best and worst parts about operating as an expat in North Korea?

Olivier Vaysset: Not having known the USSR under Stalin or the early years of Communist China, it was a unique experience. I am very pleased to have been able to communicate directly or through intermediaries with various North Korean interlocutors and to have shared in ordinary activities with the populace.

I never felt any negative feelings towards myself, unlike my experience in some other countries. I have to thank my foreign colleagues, NGOs and UN workers for that.

The suffering of the people and the (relative) absurdity of the system only make the resilience of the North Koreans even more moving. Such energy brings hope for a slow evolution of the country, particularly with the intelligence and courage of the women to find practical solutions.

The experience also gave me the opportunity to get a better understanding of myself and to test my own ability to go beyond mere intellectual habits.

Re: North Korea human rights

May 7, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

During your State of the Union ("SOTU") Address, the whole world watched as you elevated the role that human rights should play with respect to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("DPRK"). We were heartened to see that you highlighted stories from the North Korean community, showcasing how each of their stories "is a testament to the yearning of every human soul to live in freedom". We could not agree more. Now, as the United States discusses a proposed summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, we urge you to include human rights issues in all discussions with the DPRK including in the summit agenda.

We strongly believe that the United States and others in the international community should not hold back on condemning human rights abuses in an effort to support diplomatic dialogues. The US, in close collaboration with rest of the international community, should bring diplomatic engagement and pressure on behalf of the people of the DPRK with regards to human rights issues. This would be consistent with both the imperative to protect and promote human rights, and the United States' efforts to protect the Korean peninsula from the effects of nuclear weapons.

As you described during the SOTU Address, any discussion about the nuclear threat North Korea poses cannot be separated from how the DPRK treats its own people. The United Nations Security Council has recognized in several recent debates and resolutions that human rights abuses in the DPRK are an important element of any discussion on the DPRK's nuclear weapons [as the North Korean government continues to prioritize nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles over the basic needs of its own people](#). In December 2017, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, said that "the international security crisis regarding the DPRK's military actions is inseparable from concerns about the human rights situation of ordinary people in the country." On March 12, 2018, at the UN Human Rights Council, Tomás Ojea-Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in DPRK, urged UN member states that "any advancement on the security dialogue should be accompanied by a parallel expansion of human rights dialogue." Any resolution of security issues on the Korean peninsula should require addressing the DPRK's repressive human rights record and pressing the North Korean government to commit to fundamental and wide-ranging reforms.

During 2017, there were some limited but important steps taken by the DPRK to re-engage with UN human rights mechanisms, creating a window of opportunity. According to Special Rapporteur Ojea-Quintana "the momentum is there for the negotiations to use and to bring the human rights issues into the discussion." Mr. President -- we recommend that you use that opportunity, and urge the DPRK to improve its human rights record.

We ask that you include the following issues in the agenda of all meetings with the DPRK, including your summit with Kim Jong Un:

1. Acting on United Nations Human Rights Recommendations

The UN Commission of Inquiry on DPRK found systematic and widespread human rights violations in North Korea, in many instances constituting crimes against humanity, including:

- The existence of a prison camp system where individuals deemed political enemies of the state, sometimes along with their entire families, are held indefinitely;
- Torture, forced labor, starvation and other ill-treatment, as well as executions used routinely in these camps and other penal facilities;
- For the vast majority of North Koreans, the denial of universally recognized human rights, including police interfering with religious activities, and to freedom of movement, expression, and association.
- The deliberate and systematic closing off of North Koreans from contact with the rest of the world by preventing them from traveling, unsupervised communications, and denying them access to outside information.

We recommend that you urge the DPRK to immediately implement the following steps by:

- Opening all government detention facilities, reeducation and forced labor camps, and prisons to visits by international observers, and taking steps to release any detainees held for activities that should not, under international law, be criminalized, such as exercising their rights to freedom of speech and religion and belief, or attempting to leave or leaving the country without permission.
- Engaging with and responding to recommendations and opinions from the UN Human Rights Council and the Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and engaging with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, including facilitating a country visit by him and other relevant UN special mechanisms.
- Continuing to engage with UN human rights mechanisms, including the upcoming Universal Periodic Review and under the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; accepting UN recommendations and implementing changes on the ground; and signing and ratifying key human rights treaties, including International Labour Organization conventions and the Convention against Torture.

2. Appoint a Special Envoy for DPRK Human Rights Issues

We urge you to appoint a Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues. By elevating the issue to a Special Envoy role, the position would coordinate a whole-of-government US strategy on bringing international pressure to bear on Pyongyang for improvements in human rights both at the summit and in conjunction with the United States' allies and partners. That responsibility should also include the following:

- To establish a regular US-North Korea human rights dialogue and ensure that it is principled, follows clear benchmarks, and is accountable. Such meetings should be followed by reports to Congress and public briefings about their content and agreements on next steps, which should include follow-up meetings at the highest levels of each government.
- Advocate further information and personal exchanges and promote the rights to freedom of expression, information and movement.

3. Separated Families and Abductions

An estimated one million Koreans have been separated or forcibly removed from their families through displacement during the war, enforced disappearances and abductions, or [following escape from the DPRK](#). The Japanese government has also identified several Japanese citizens who were abducted by the North Korean government and has stated that this remains the most important question for Japan during the US-North Korea

summit. Currently, there are over 30,000 North Koreans in South Korea, Japan, and other countries with no legal way to communicate with family members in North Korea.

We recommend that you urge the DPRK:

- Press North Korea to respect the right of every person to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to her/his country, including by granting exit visas to all persons who hold or have held South Korean or other foreign nationality and their family members who wish to leave North Korea for South Korea or other countries.
- Urge the DPRK to engage constructively on the issue of abductions and to commit seriously to investigate and respond to the allegations made against it.

4. Humanitarian Assistance

According to the UN World Food Program (“WFP”), around 70 percent of the population in the DPRK are food insecure. This affects children, and pregnant and nursing women the hardest. One in three children under five years of age, and almost half of the children between 12 and 23 months, were anemic. In October 2017, WFP said it needed US\$25.5 million for the following six months to [aid North Korean women and children](#).

Humanitarian aid is an international responsibility and is necessary to protect human life and rights. At the same time, oversight is crucial to ensure that aid goes to those who need it most and is not diverted to the DPRK military or others, regardless of whether it is provided directly by the United States, the United Nations, or through private institutions.

We recommend that you

- Provide necessary humanitarian aid and urge the DPRK government to accept [international or domestic humanitarian aid](#), with proper monitoring consistent with international standards of transparency and accountability. These standards include access throughout the country to determine needs and the ability to visit places where food and other aid is delivered.

Thank you for your consideration and we would be happy to discuss these issues further with you or your staff. If you would like to arrange a meeting please contact Francisco Bencosme, Amnesty International’s Asia Advocacy Manager at FBencosme@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International USA
ALTSEAN-Burma
Committee for Human Rights in North Korea
Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l (Brussels)
Korea Future Initiative

Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice
Liberty in North Korea
Midwest Alliance for North Korean Refugees
One Free Korea
People for Successful COrean Reunification
The Center for Victims of Torture
World Without Genocide

Over 1,000 North Korean workers slated for dispatch to China

By Ha Yoon Ah

Daily NK (12.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2FaR3MK> - Over 1,000 North Korean laborers are preparing to be dispatched to work assignments in Dandong, China, a source in the area informed Daily NK on Wednesday. This follows sightings earlier this month of over 400 North Korean workers in the Chinese city of Helong to the east, together suggesting the two countries may be cooperating to restart joint business ventures in China.

"There are already about 100 North Koreans working at one clothing factory in Dandong, and they are expecting 1,000 more after a recent conversation with a manager from the North Korean side," the source said on April 11.

The Chinese manager in the deal told the source that it is a popular opportunity among North Korean factory workers as they see it as a good chance to improve their skills, despite their expectations of low pay and long hours. "People around here are anticipating an influx of more North Korean workers in the near future," the source remarked.

A separate source in China confirmed the development, saying, "It is true that over a thousand North Korean workers are preparing for the assignment. The Chinese brokers who have engineered the deal for the jobs are working overtime right now."

He added that the workers are still receiving permits from North Korean authorities to cross into China, as per standard guidelines, though these permits only technically allow up to 30 days' stay abroad.

"[The Chinese companies] are trying to recruit more North Korean workers now as they feel sanctions may possibly be lifted and that the dangers have subsided. But they will just send them back in case they are not [lifted]," he said.

Following these developments, some are speculating that Kim Jong Un may have come to an agreement with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the matter during their meeting in Beijing last month.

Recent friction between China and the US over a brewing trade war may also be contributing to a sense of optimism among those affected in the region.

"We (Chinese people) are also hurting from sanctions, and now it seems like we are in a trade war with the US," an additional source in China said.

"Knowing this, it is possible that authorities, despite sanctions, are turning a blind eye to the arrival of the North Korean workers."

*Translated by Colin Zwirko

40 NGOs write to South Korean President Moon

April 9, 2018

Moon Jae-in

President of the Republic of Korea
1 Cheongwadae-ro, Jongno-gu
Seoul 03048
Republic of Korea

Fax: +82 2-770-4721
E-mail: president@president.go.kr

Dear President Moon,

As your government discusses a proposed summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, we welcome the renewed inter-Korean dialogue and the recent progress in inter-Korean relations and urge your government to press for human rights issues to be included in all discussions with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), including in the summit agenda.

The United Nations Security Council has recognized in several recent debates and resolutions that human rights abuses in the DPRK and regional peace and security are [intrinsically connected](#). Any long-term resolution of security issues on the Korean peninsula will require addressing the DPRK's repressive rights record and pressing the North Korean government to commit to fundamental and wide-ranging reforms. On March 12, 2018, at the UN Human Rights Council, Tomás Ojea-Quintana, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea, urged countries to make it a priority to [keep pressure on the DPRK](#) to improve its human rights record and not allow it to be sidelined or upstaged by concerns about the DPRK's weapons proliferation, noting that "any advancement on the security dialogue should be accompanied by a parallel expansion on human rights dialogue."

We agree and urge you to include the following issues in the agenda of all meetings with the DPRK, including your summit with Kim Jong Un:

1. Acting on United Nations Human Rights Recommendations

During 2017, there was some limited re-engagement by the DPRK with international human rights mechanisms. We recommend that you urge the DPRK to enlarge the scope of its cooperation, including in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), such as:

- Undertaking immediate steps to address allegations about poor conditions and abuses in detention centers and prisons, including by opening all government detention centers, reeducation and forced labor camps, jails, and prisons to visits by international observers, and taking steps to release any detainees held for activities that should not, under international law, be criminalized, such as exercising freedom of speech and religion, attempting to leave or leaving the country without permission.
- Engaging with and responding to recommendations and opinions from the UN Human Rights Council and the Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and engaging with the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, including facilitating a country visit by him and other relevant UN rapporteurs.
- Continuing to engage with UN human rights mechanisms, including the upcoming UPR and under the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; accepting UN recommendations and implementing changes on the ground; and signing and ratifying key human rights treaties, including International Labor Organization conventions and the Convention against Torture.

2. Inter-Korean Human Rights Engagement

The ROK's North Korean human rights act of March 2016 calls on the ROK to seek a human rights dialogue with the DPRK and exchange information "[to protect and promote the human rights of North Koreans](#)." We recommend that you press the DPRK to:

- Establish a regular inter-Korean human rights dialogue and ensure that it is principled, follows clear benchmarks, and is accountable. Such meetings should be followed by public briefings about their content and agreements on next steps, which should include follow up meetings at the highest levels of each government.
- Allow further inter-Korean information and personal exchanges and promote freedom of information and movement.
- Agree on mutual free and uncensored television and radio broadcasts across the peninsula. One proposed first step could be negotiating for mutual broadcast of ROK national television channel KBS and the DPRK's KCTV.

3. Involuntarily Separated Families and Abductions

Since the Korean War (1950-1953), an estimated one million Koreans have been separated or forcibly removed from their families through displacement during the war, enforced disappearances and abductions, or [following escape from the DPRK](#). According to the Ministry of Unification, about [130,000 ROK citizens](#) have applied to take part in reunion meetings organized by the two Korean governments since 1988. Only about 18,800 people have met their families in reunions, while approximately 60,000 are still waiting to meet their family members. More than 60 percent are now in their 80s or older.

The Korean War Abductees Family Union estimates that South Korean civilians abducted across the border during the Korean War range between 82,000 and 100,000 individuals. The South Korean government documented over 500 abductions of South Korean nationals since the 1953 armistice. Since 2013, seven South Koreans have been detained in North Korea. Currently, there are over 30,000 North Koreans in South Korea with no legal way to communicate with family members in North Korea.

We recommend that you:

- Continue to urge the DPRK to agree to regular reunion meetings of separated families, expanding its scope to any South Korean national with relatives in the DPRK, and allow regular exchanges of letters or phone calls and visits between them, at least on humanitarian grounds. Such meetings should not be held hostage to developments on security matters or inter-Korea relations.
- Press North Korea to respect the right of every person to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to her/his country, including by granting exit visas to all persons who hold or have held South Korean or other foreign nationality and their family members who wish to leave North Korea for South Korea or other countries. The International Committee of the Red Cross should be asked to independently assess each individual's wishes in private interviews.
- Urge the DPRK to engage in broader exchange on the issue of abductions and to commit seriously to investigate and respond to the allegations made against it.
- Allow South Korean nationals to identify and collect the remains of deceased family members held by North Korea and vice versa.
- Lift existing legal restrictions on inter-Korean people-to-people contact in North and South Korea.

4. Humanitarian Aid

According to UNICEF, in December 2017 an estimated [18 million people](#) in the DPRK were experiencing food insecurity, while 200,000 children were acutely malnourished. One in three children under five years of age, and almost half of the children between 12 and 23 months, were anemic. In October 2017, the UN World Food Program said it

needed US\$25.5 million for the following six months to [aid North Korean women and children](#). UNICEF faces a shortfall of US\$9.6 million to cover its programs in the DPRK in 2018. In September 2017, South Korea pledged to donate US\$8 million to these two organizations, at a time to be established.

Humanitarian aid is an international responsibility and is crucial to protect human life and rights. At the same time, it is crucial to monitor the distribution of aid to ensure it is delivered to its intended recipients, the most vulnerable, and not diverted to the DPRK military or others, regardless of whether it is provided directly by the ROK or through South Korean private institutions. Humanitarian aid for vulnerable populations is critical for young children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, persons in detention, and pregnant and nursing women. We recommend that you:

- Provide necessary humanitarian aid and urge the DPRK government to accept [international or domestic humanitarian aid](#), with proper monitoring consistent with international standards of transparency and accountability. These standards include access throughout the country to determine needs and the ability to visit places where food and other aid is delivered.

We are fully aware that raising human rights issues with the DPRK is a daunting task and note North Korea's comment on March 31, 2018, saying South Korea's support of a resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea at the UN Human Rights Council, is "an open political provocation to the DPRK and an intolerable act of chilling the atmosphere for dialogue." However, we believe South Korea should maintain its "firm stance" as Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said but should further press to bring up the subject. Your government's leadership is crucial in efforts to help improve human rights conditions in the DPRK while at the same time finding real, long-term solutions to the security crisis.

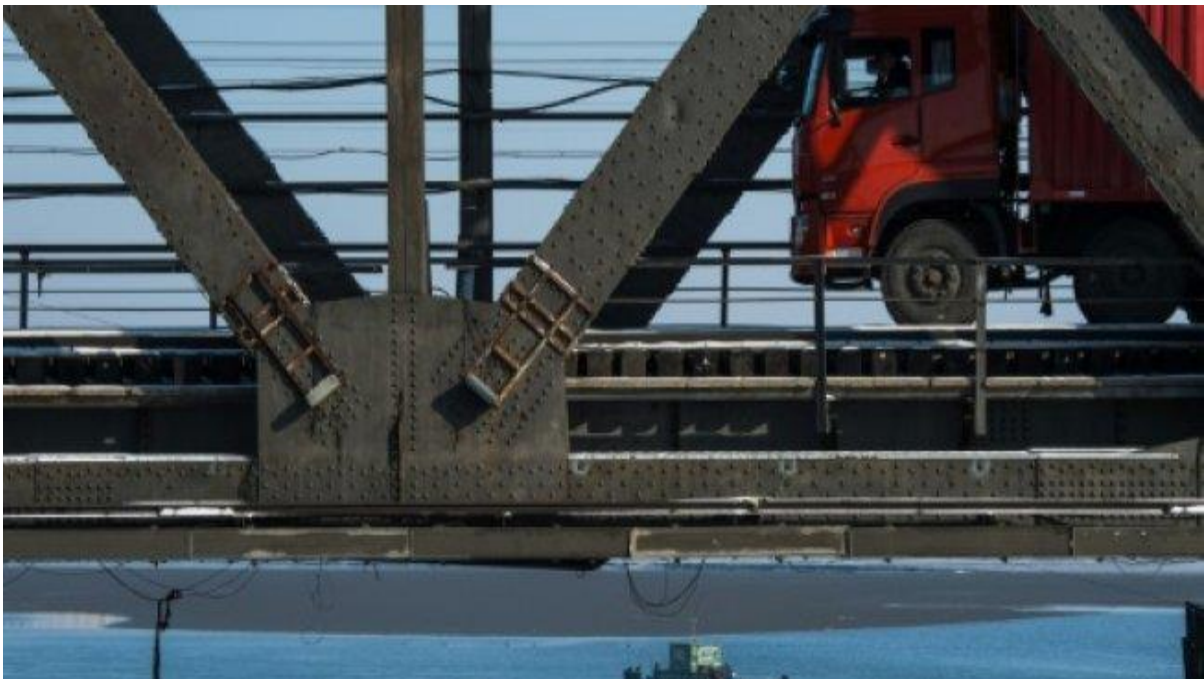
Thank you for your consideration and we would be pleased to discuss these matters further with your staff.

Sincerely,

1969 KAL Abductees' Families Association, South Korea
ALTSEAN-Burma, Thailand
Amnesty International
Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)
Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos, Perú
Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL), Argentina
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR), South Korea
The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), United States
Han Voice, Canada
Helping Hands Korea_Catacombs, South Korea
Human Rights Watch
Human Rights Without Frontiers, Belgium
International Christian Concern (ICC), United States
International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK)
International Commission of Jurists
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights (JBI), United States
Korean War Abductees' Family Union (KWAFU), South Korea
Liberty in North Korea (LINK), United States
National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, Japan
NKnet, South Korea
NK Watch, South Korea

No Fence, Japan
North Korea Freedom Coalition, United States
North Korea Strategy Center (NKSC), South Korea
Now Action & Unity for Human Rights (NAUH), South Korea
Open North Korea, South Korea
Peace and Hope International, United States
People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE), South Korea
Refuge Pnan, South Korea
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, United States
Saram, Germany
Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC), South Africa
The Association for the Rescue of North Korea Abductees (ARNKA), Thailand
The Korea Future Initiative, United Kingdom
Transitional Justice Working Group, South Korea
Unification Academy, South Korea
Unification Media Group, South Korea

US sanctions N. Korean, Chinese firms aiding Pyongyang



© AFP/File | A truck on the bridge from Dandong, China into North Korea: Washington says Chinese companies in Dandong continue to trade with North Korea in violation of sanctions

AFP (24.01.2018) - The United States slapped new sanctions on North Korean and Chinese firms and individuals that it said support the Pyongyang regime of Kim Jong-Un and his nuclear weapons program.

The move comes as the US seeks to choke the flow of goods and materials crucial to North Korea's economy like oil, electronics and metals, and pressure Kim to halt the development of nuclear weapons that threaten the region and potentially the US mainland.

The new sanctions issued by the US Treasury included representatives of North Korean companies and banks mostly based in China and Russia; North Korean shipping companies and six specific vessels; and two Chinese trading firms.

"Treasury continues to systematically target individuals and entities financing the Kim regime and its weapons programs, including officials complicit in North Korean sanctions evasion schemes," Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said in a statement.

Following UN sanctions, Mnuchin said, "the US government is targeting illicit actors in China, Russia, and elsewhere who are working on behalf of North Korean financial networks, and calling for their expulsion from the territories where they reside.

"We are sanctioning additional oil, shipping, and trading companies that continue to provide a lifeline to North Korea to fuel this regime's nuclear ambitions and destabilizing activities."

The sanctions seek to lock those named out of the global economy by banning US individuals and companies -- including foreign banks and trading firms with US entities -- from doing business with them.

North Korean traders and bankers

Ten of the individuals listed for sanctions were representatives of Korea Ryonbong General Corporation, a UN-designated company that makes acquisitions and supports sales for the North Korea defense industry.

Most were based in Chinese cities on the border with North Korea, nearby Russian cities, where they helped arrange shipping of materials and goods to North Korea.

One Ryonbong representative was based in Abkhazia, Georgia, where according to the Treasury he arranged to deploy North Korean workers, which Pyongyang uses to obtain foreign currency.

Five others worked for North Korean banks in the northern Chinese cities of Dalian and Shenyang, and in Vladivostok, Russia.

Two Chinese businesses, Beijing Chengxing Trading Co. and Dandong Jinxiang Trade Co., were placed on the sanctions blacklist sales of everything from high purity metals to used computers to North Korean businesses already named for sanctions.

Five North Korean shipping companies and six vessels were also blacklisted, as the US targets efforts by Pyongyang to obtain needed materials like oil and coal via ship to ship transfers from foreign vessels on the high seas.

The sanctions also included the North Korean Ministry of Crude Oil Industry, which could affect any foreign oil supplier doing business with the ministry.

Frustrated with China, Russia

The new sanctions represent Washington's frustrations that both China and Russia continue to enable or turn a blind eye to their own companies and shippers still doing business with North Korea.

That serves to erode the impact of sanctions designed to slow Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missiles program, and press Kim into negotiations.

Earlier Wednesday a senior US Treasury official warned Hong Kong authorities Wednesday they must stop the city being used as a "safe harbor" for illicit trade with North Korea, in violation of United Nations sanctions.

Russia's hidden world of North Korean labor

By Emma Burrows & Matthew Chance

CNN (16.01.2018) - <http://cnn.it/2D6OWcK> - In pre-fabricated buildings, down a muddy track on the outskirts of St. Petersburg lies a world of hidden North Korean labor in Russia.

On a construction site near their shabby living quarters, a group of laborers building apartment blocks told CNN they are from North Korea. Working in conditions the US State Department calls "slave-like" labor, they are among an estimated 50,000 workers in Russia from the isolated state.

US diplomats say up to 80% of their earnings are sent back to Pyongyang to help prop up the regime of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The United Nations has expressed concern that this money — totaling \$500 million a year from North Korea's expatriate workers globally — helps to fund Kim's missile and nuclear programs.

According to a UN Security Council resolution aimed at curbing North Korea's nuclear ambitions, countries are allowed to employ quotas of North Korean workers but not to authorize new work permits.

Under the most recent round of sanctions, Resolution 2397 states that all North Korean workers must be sent home by December 2019, cutting off a crucial source of income for Pyongyang. However, because it is unclear how many North Korean workers are currently in Russia, analysts say it is not clear whether all of them will go home.

The restriction placed on workers was part of a package of sanctions passed by the Security Council last December, which included limiting North Korea's oil imports and expanding bans on exports to the country of industrial equipment, machinery and metals.

The tougher sanctions were implemented following another North Korean missile test. Launched on November 29, the Hwasong-15 reached the highest-ever altitude by a North Korean missile, putting the entire US mainland in range, state media said.

Tighter sanctions

Although Russia backed the December UN resolution against North Korea, one senior Russian lawmaker has expressed doubts about the effectiveness of sanctions as a way to limit Kim Jong Un's ability to develop his weapons program.

"Like North Korea, Russia is also under economic sanctions. I am sure that these economic sanctions, including American sanctions, have never had any impact on our domestic or foreign policy," Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Russian parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, told CNN.

"Sanctions are the wrong instrument. This is not the solution to the problem of North Korea," he said.

Tensions easing

North Korea dubbed the latest round of sanctions an "act of war" but since they were introduced, tensions have eased on the Korean peninsula with the start of the first face-to-face talks between North and South Korea in almost two years.

South Korean President Moon Jae-In credited US President Donald Trump's pressure campaign with producing the right environment for talks but North Korea's state news agency hit back, saying that the breakthrough came with better inter-Korean relations.

"It is unbearable to look at South Korea's servile attitude of thanking Trump as if the results of inter-Korean talks happened because of their international sanctions and pressures," [said the report](#).

Russia has been widely accused of undermining the spirit of the sanctions on Pyongyang by employing North Korean workers and the Russian Foreign Ministry has defended the country against reports that it has provided North Korea with shipments of fuel, saying, under the sanctions, countries are allowed to supply oil under a "quota."

Sen. Konstantin Kosachev denied any suggestion that Russia was not committed to the UN resolution on North Korea, telling CNN that Russia firmly adheres to "any sanctions which are supported by the Security Council."

Russian lifeline

However, according to Alexander Gabuev, chair of the Russia in the Asia-Pacific Program at the Carnegie Moscow Center, Russia's support of sanctions is begrudging and stems from a desire to prevent pro-western regime change in Pyongyang.

"I don't think Russia really believes in the sanctions," Gabuev said.

"There comes a point when Russia cannot afford to be the villain" and rip up sanctions against Pyongyang, Gabuev said, as "this may worsen an already bad relationship with the United States."

"While signing the international sanctions," he said, "Russia fights to make them as toothless as it can."

Ahead of the adoption of additional sanctions against North Korea last December, Russian President Vladimir Putin was [reported by the South Korean presidential spokesman](#) as saying that Russia was against cutting off oil supplies to North Korea.

"Keeping Pyongyang afloat is an important task," Gabuev said. "The country cannot do without imported fuel, which is why Russia concentrated its diplomatic effort on this, in order not to squeeze the regime too hard."

On the building site in St Petersburg, CNN approached camera-shy workers having their lunch in a canteen with signs in Korean on the walls.

Positions as overseas laborers are coveted, according to Gabuev, as workers can provide for their families as they take home better wages abroad.

But although Russia insists that the money earned by workers is used to help North Koreans to survive, critics believe the reason it continues to employ them is because it wants to avoid pro-western regime change.

"The uncontrolled collapse of North Korea means either refugee flows or war, but also ultimately a reunified Korea which is allied to the United States," Gabuev told CNN. "This could mean US troops on the Russian border which is definitely not something Russia would like to see," he added.

Moscow is engaged in a delicate balancing act — formally backing international sanctions to pressure the North Korean regime, but also extending Pyongyang a crucial lifeline.

Even in Poland, workers' wages flow to North Korea

By Peter S. Goodman, Choe Sang-Hun and Joanna Berendt

New York Times (01.01.2018) - <http://nyti.ms/2IjJ3H> - At an isolated shipyard on Poland's Baltic coast, men in coveralls used welding torches under a cold drizzle, forging an oil tanker for a customer in the Netherlands. The scene was unremarkable, save for the provenance of a dozen of the workers.

"Yes, we are from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," one of them said. "We have been here quite a while." Then he hurried away, alarm seizing his face.

Four other welders confirmed that they were also from North Korea, the pariah state threatening the United States and much of East Asia with nuclear weapons. They, too, then scampered off.

For decades, North Korea has dispatched laborers to points around the globe, engaging tens of thousands in logging, mining and construction ventures while taking a hefty slice of their earnings. The United States has sought to shut down this enterprise, lobbying other countries to eject the workers and eliminate a source of hard currency for the North Korean economy.

But the continued presence of these workers in Poland — a NATO ally at the heart of the European Union — underscores how difficult it is to fully sever North Korea from the global economy, even as the nation accelerates efforts to build a nuclear missile capable of striking the United States.

In December, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution requiring all countries to expel North Korean workers within two years. The resolution, which followed the North's launch of a new intercontinental ballistic missile in November, also imposed a sharp cut in oil shipments to the nation.

On Thursday, President Trump accused China of allowing fuel to be smuggled into North Korea, saying Beijing had been caught in the act. The assertion came amid reports of secret ship-to-ship transfers in international waters by Chinese and Russian vessels.

China and Russia, which host the majority of North Korea's overseas workers, have long resisted American efforts to impose a global embargo on the nation. Even the European Union agreed only in October to stop renewing work permits for North Koreans.

Poland sent soldiers to fight alongside Americans in Iraq, but is nonetheless one of the few countries still hosting North Korean workers over Washington's objections.

The State Labor Inspectorate, which regulates working conditions at Polish companies, said that perhaps 450 North Koreans remained in the country as of mid-2017, employed by at least 19 companies, including a complex of greenhouses growing tomatoes south of Warsaw.

But The New York Times found North Korean workers at two other businesses — the shipyard in Police, near the German border, and a factory that makes shipping containers in the town of Człuchów, 100 miles southwest of Gdansk.

In Poland, provincial governments issue work permits to foreign laborers, and there is little coordination with national agencies. As a result, no one appears to know precisely how many North Koreans are in Poland or what they are doing.

The Foreign Ministry has urged local governments to stop approving work permits for North Koreans, and new legislation taking effect in January will require them to do so. But until now, the provinces have persisted, illustrating the durability of commercial relationships forged during the Cold War, when Poland was a fellow member of the Communist bloc.

Relations between Poland and North Korea cooled after the fall of the Soviet Union, but Poland remains one of seven European nations to maintain embassies in Pyongyang.

The Times requested information on work permits issued to North Koreans from Poland's 16 provincial governments. Nine responded, reporting that they had given 124 new permits to North Koreans in 2017, and 253 the previous year.

Washington has intensified pressure on countries to stop hosting North Korean laborers, and the list of countries doing so has dropped to perhaps 16, including Austria and several Persian Gulf states, from about 40, according to human rights groups and United Nations reports.

The Polish government has repeatedly pledged to phase out work permits for North Koreans after negative attention in academic papers and news reports.

But the European Union has not pressed the issue, fearful of ratcheting up tensions over sovereignty issues after Britain's vote to exit the bloc. Poland's right-wing government has bristled at European criticism of its moves to exercise greater control of the courts.

"The E.U. has been afraid of driving Poland further away," said Remco Breuker, a historian and Korea expert at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

'Very Unusual'

In a warren of streets near the Oder River in Police, a dreary town of 40,000, North Korean workers are often seen walking near train tracks from the Partner shipyard to a grocery store.

Sometimes they squat on the sidewalks in front of their dormitory, smoking cigarettes while braced against a biting wind. In the evenings, they trudge to buy pastries or vegetables. On Sundays, they congregate at a local elementary school for soccer games.

"It's something very unusual," said Pawel Wieczorkowski, deputy director of the local unemployment office. "It's exotic."

The workers appear intent on maintaining a low profile. With few exceptions, North Korea's totalitarian government forbids citizens from mixing with outsiders. Those who fall under suspicion can face arrest.

"We are here legally. We pay taxes to the local government," a North Korean worker said after being approached outside the dormitory. Asked about reports that workers have been mistreated, he snapped, "They are all lies!" Then he got in a van and drove away, down a muddy alley.

North Koreans working elsewhere in Poland also keep to themselves.

At the greenhouse complex that employs North Koreans, the workers' dormitory was surrounded by a seven-foot-high concrete wall. But through a crack, a heavyset man in a thick parka could be seen directing six women to wash a blue Ford van in the winter chill.

In Koldowo, a speck of a village some 200 miles northwest of Warsaw, residents said a group of North Koreans arrived in early 2017 for jobs at Remprodex, a manufacturer of shipping containers in the nearby town of Człuchów.

During their first months, they slept inside empty containers despite the cold, residents said. Later, the workers rented half of a house tucked inside a walled compound.

Remprodex did not respond to questions, and Times reporters were turned away at the estate of the Kociszewscy family, which owns the greenhouses.

The countries hosting North Korean workers have defended the arrangements, arguing that they expose the laborers to the outside world and help them support their families. Conditions back home can be so desperate that some North Koreans pay bribes to get these jobs.

But human rights organizations, North Korean defectors and United Nations monitors have described the assignments as forced labor because the workers are physically confined, under constant surveillance and deprived of most of their wages.

As many as 147,000 North Koreans now work abroad, according to a recent estimate by the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul, and the ruling Workers' Party in Pyongyang is said to seize anywhere from 30 to 80 percent of each laborer's earnings.

That amounts to a significant revenue source for a regime increasingly pinched by international sanctions — between \$200 million and \$500 million annually, according to most experts.

'Trade Secrets'

The call that would put her in business with North Korea came around 2007, Cecylia Kowalska recalled.

At the time, she ran a company in the port city of Gdansk that supplied electrical and welding services to the shipping and construction industries.

A shipyard in Gdansk needed someone to manage 10 North Korean welders who had worked there in the past, she said. They had been employed through another firm that had struggled to pay them on time.

Ms. Kowalska, now 67, said her company, Armex, assumed responsibility for the workers, and then established a relationship with the North Korean partners who had brought them to Poland.

She later began supplying North Korean welders to two other shipyards, run by Crist S.A. and Nauta S.A., both companies that make war vessels for NATO members.

"They were skilled and hard-working," she said of the North Koreans.

Ms. Kowalska also served as the legal representative of a company called Wonye that was established to supply workers to factories, shipyards, and fruit and vegetable wholesalers, according to Polish corporate records.

The records identify Wonye's president as a North Korean named Jo Chol-yong.

In the mid-1990s, a man of the same name and birth date worked for a North Korean company controlled by the ruling party department that oversees the nation's nuclear and missile programs, according to a registry of Pyongyang residents smuggled out of North Korea.

Wonye's vice president is listed as Kang Hong-gu, who appears to have previously served as commander of a unit involved in construction, the 8th Sokdojon Brigade, according to the Pyongyang registry.

Ms. Kowalska said she helped establish Wonye in 2015 as a favor to one of her North Korean partners but never took an active role and sold her shares the next year.

According to research by Mr. Breuker and his colleagues, Armex received its workers from the Rungrado General Trading Corporation, a North Korean supplier of overseas workers sanctioned by the United States in 2016 and accused of funding the department that oversees the nuclear weapons program.

Asked about her partners, Ms. Kowalska said she was uncertain of their names and promised to look them up. But she later declined to identify them, saying that doing so would divulge "trade secrets."

Once, she recalled, one of the North Koreans suggested she buy a gift for officials in Pyongyang — a sword. "A sign of our thanks for this partnership," she said. "I thought it was like buying someone flowers."

The sword was later displayed in a hall for gifts to North Korea's leaders and highlighted in a North Korean propaganda video that identified Armex by name.

Ms. Kowalska said the partnership proceeded smoothly until three years ago, when a North Korean welder without adequate safety gear burned to death at the Crist shipyard. The accident alarmed Crist's customers, among them a Danish shipbuilder that had employed the Polish shipyard to handle work on a war vessel for Denmark, another NATO member.

Soon afterward, Ms. Kowalska said, she stopped hiring North Korean workers "because it became such a sensitive issue." She added that she was now retired and no longer managed North Korean workers.

But her North Korean partners still appear to be active in Poland.

On a recent afternoon, Times reporters spotted two vehicles with Polish license plates parked outside the workers' dormitory at the tomato greenhouses: the van that was being washed and a dark Mercedes sedan.

According to records seen by The Times, the van is registered to Wonye's vice president, Mr. Kang, and the Mercedes to its president, Mr. Jo.

A Parallel Reality

Though the European Union maintains extensive labor protections, North Koreans who have worked there describe a parallel reality.

"Our girls lived as if they were in prison," said Kim Tae-san, a North Korean defector who worked in the Czech Republic from 2000 to 2002 supervising 200 young North Korean women in a shoe factory.

He said the women were forced to remain during off-hours in their dormitory, where they attended ideological study sessions and could watch only movies and propaganda documentaries sent from home.

Once a week, he added, they were allowed out to go to the market — but only in groups.

North Koreans sent to work overseas are vetted for political loyalty, but the government also sends minders to watch them. Mr. Kim said the workers also "monitored each other."

The women worked six days a week, earning \$150 a month but keeping only about \$25 for food and savings. Their supervisors took the rest, Mr. Kim said, spending some of the money on housing but sending most of it back to the authorities in North Korea.

Poles who have worked with North Koreans describe similar conditions. A shipyard worker at Crist, for example, recalled how a North Korean colleague fell ill on the job and was urged by a paramedic to stop working. Instead, the man became frantic, insisting he had to continue.

"This is slave labor," said Agnes Jongerius, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, who has urged European authorities to force Poland to stop admitting North Korean workers.

Ms. Kowalska scoffed at allegations of abuse and said the North Koreans she managed enjoyed "a normal life."

"They asked us for advice on what to buy their wives and kids," she said. "They liked to buy lingerie for their wives. It was a popular gift, and they would ask us about inexpensive shops."

She said her company paid the workers about \$780 per month. She acknowledged at first that Armex sent a portion of their wages to a North Korean company, but later said she had misspoken and no one took a cut.

As international scrutiny has intensified, the State Labor Inspectorate has vowed to investigate claims of abuse. So far, the agency has found "no signs of forced labor," said Dorota Gorajska, an official responsible for companies that employ foreign workers.

Officials acknowledged, however, that inspections have generally been confined to paperwork and that when interviews are conducted, investigators typically rely on translators provided by employers.

Given North Korea's reputation, does that not taint their findings? An official at the inspectorate, Michal Tyczynski, took a deep breath.

"It's a tricky question," he said. "There is no good answer to this question."
