

# Seven detained North Korean defectors in China face repatriation

Radio Free Asia (29.04.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2GQfu5i>– Seven North Korean defectors in China are facing forcible repatriation after being arrested by Chinese police last week, according to a South Korea-based North Korean human rights advocacy group.

Peter Jung, the founder of Justice for North Korea, issued a press release Monday saying that among the defectors was a nine-year-old girl surnamed Choi and her 32-year-old uncle surnamed Kang, and that all seven are to be repatriated.

North Koreans who escape the isolated state typically face harsh punishments if they are sent back. Penalties including incarceration are not reserved for the defectors themselves; often their family members are also punished.

The U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea, a key 2014 study of the country's situation, has said that China's forced repatriations of North Korean migrants and defectors might amount to "aiding and abetting crimes against humanity."

Of the seven defectors now in Chinese custody, Jung said that his organization received a request to help them after they were arrested just north of the Yalu river, which separates

China from North Korea.

He said they crossed the river earlier this month and were waiting to move to their next destination while hiding out just outside Shenyang in Liaoning Province.

The young Choi's mother, who lives in South Korea, contacted the South Korean consulate in Shenyang on Friday evening to tell them about the situation and ask the South Korean government to intervene.

"[She] visited South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human rights," said Jung.

"She is doing everything she can to save her daughter so she is physically and mentally exhausted," he said.

"We are seriously concerned about forced repatriation of North Korean defectors, especially [children like] Choi," said Jung.

Jung said he hoped South Korea and China's respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs would meet to discuss the situation, and that the South Korean government should do everything possible to help the defectors reach their desired destination safely.

He pointed out that Choi is a child and a refugee and should be protected under international law.

“Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Status of Refugees, [China] should protect Choi and stop forced repatriation,” he said.

He also hoped that the defectors would be allowed to contact the UN Refugee Agency and that the agency would take action on their behalf. China has not permitted such contacts in the past.

South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it is analyzing the situation.

“We are taking necessary steps [and will act accordingly] as soon as we get a better grasp of the situation,” said a ministry spokesperson.

“Please understand that the details regarding North Korean defectors cannot be disclosed to the public in consideration of the safety of North Korean defectors and of the diplomatic relations with the host country,” said the spokesperson.

More than 30,000 North Koreans have made their way to South Korea in recent decades, including several senior diplomats.

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