

CHINA/NORTH KOREA: Shadowed children

By Soumin Shin

HRWF (16.09.2017) – According to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, there are currently an estimated 4,000 unprotected children of North Korean mothers and Chinese fathers living in Northeast China and the eastern Jilin province. The Commission conducted a survey of one hundred North Korean children in China and found that only fifteen of them lived with both of their parents.

These children are not entitled to Chinese citizenship because their North Korean mothers live in China as illegal immigrants, and registering a child would lead to a forced repatriation of the mother. Without citizenship, these children do not have the legal right to access social welfare services for education, medical services, marriage licenses, and establishing bank accounts. They are not recognized or protected by the Chinese government, nor by the South Korean government, which also does not provide solutions regarding these children.

The most prevalent outcome of the increase in unprotected children is that their mothers are forcefully repatriated to North Korea (36%) or their mothers run away from the family (31%). A majority of the women that run away choose to go to South Korea, due to their unstable citizenship statuses and economic hardships.

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea has proposed a few solutions to the issue. It requested that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea to persuade China, through bilateral negotiations, to care for the children of female North Korean defectors with a more humanitarian

perspective. Furthermore, the Commission suggested that the Ministry of Unification could include a section in the White Paper on North Korean Human Rights, updated annually, that specifically addresses the human rights of North Korean defectors' children. In doing so, the situation of the children will be continuously monitored by investigators.

Shadowed in a country that does not offer a nationality to them, these children are left stateless with no one to protect them, without a nation to refer to as "home." They remain an unresolved agenda not only for the Chinese and Korean governments, but also for the international society.

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