

NORTH KOREA/CHINA: Suicide of North Korean Defectors

By Sou Min Shin (Seoul) for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (09.10.2017) – A peaceful protest against the forced repatriation of North Korean defectors was held on September 29th, 2017 in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Korea. High school students from Human Rights Korea (HRK) and Helping Kids Everyday (H.K.E.) performed a cappella songs to raise awareness of the conditions of North Korea defectors. High school students directed the protest at the Ministry, with the hope that their pleas would reach the international community. The governments of South Korea and China should deal with this issue bilaterally, they said.

On July 17th, a family of five North Korean defectors committed suicide after they were arrested in China, while facing deportation to North Korea. According to Radio Free Asia, the father was a former senior official of the Korean Workers' Party who crossed the Yalu River into China with his wife and their three children.[1] The family was caught immediately after arriving in the Yunnan Province of Southwest China. After unsuccessfully trying to bribe a local fixer, they killed themselves to avoid repatriation.

Over the past few years, North Korean defectors have carried cyanide capsules, choosing death over possible repatriation.[2] Repatriated defectors face harsh penalties for their choice to leave North Korea and many are "afraid of the severe punishment" they would face back home.

China recently repatriated several North Koreans seeking to resettle in the South, increasing the number of separated families and depriving them of family rights. In July alone, China arrested 27 North Korean defectors.[3] International

NGOs have tried to convince the Chinese government that North Korean defectors are refugees, given that they satisfy the requirements stated in the universal definition, but China has yet to change their policies. Chinese authorities refuse to discuss the legality involved and consistently maintain that North Korean defectors are not refugees. Their disregard for international law is a violation of Non-Refoulement and is utterly indefensible.

The South Korean government is also responsible for the turning a blind eye to the plight of defectors in China. The international community should note the purposeful ignorance of South Korean ambassadors in China.

[1]

http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/ne-je-07212017102139.html

[2] Chosun Ilbo : "Fugitive N.Korean Family Commit Suicide through poisoning" July 24, 2017

[3] Chosun Ilbo : "5 North Korean Defectors Commit Suicide When Captured" July 24, 2017

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