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Over 2,500 N. Koreans forced to work in Mongolia, Poland

Yonhap News Agency (23.12.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1RnYnqb> - More than 2,500 North Korean workers have been forced to work in Mongolia and Poland under poor working conditions with their human rights being violated, a South Korean civic group said Wednesday.

About 1,800 North Korean workers are being forced to work mainly in Mongolia's construction sector or in sewing factories while around 800 North Koreans are employed

in Poland in the shipbuilding and construction sectors, according to the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights.

Marzuki Darusman, U.N. special rapporteur on the human rights situation in North Korea, said in his report that more than 50,000 North Koreans have been forced to work abroad, mainly in China and Russia, as the North seeks to earn hard currency.

The civic group said Mongolia has had close ties with North Korea for a long time and a distinctive geographical location bordering Russia and China where thousands of North Koreans are forced to labor.

Poland had friendly relations with North Korea during the era of the former Soviet Union and it is known as one of two European Union nations including Malta that has hired North Korean workers.

The agency said that North Korean workers in the two countries have repatriated about 90 percent of their salary to North Korea while earning less than \$100 per month while working around 12 hours per day.

The center said that North Korean workers are dispatched to labor-intensive sectors in about 20 countries.

"The North's purpose is to earn hard currency to avert economic hardship under heavy U.N. sanctions and \$200 to \$300 million is presumed to be sent to North Korea annually," it said.

North Korea has long been branded as one of the worst human rights violators with widespread cases of rights abuses such as public execution and torture. Pyongyang has bristled at such criticism, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime.

Activists seek better conditions for North Korean migrant laborers

Voice of America (23.12.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1NC74vk> - A human rights organization in Seoul that has been documenting the harsh conditions imposed on North Korean migrant laborers appealed Wednesday to host countries to intervene to protect the worker's rights.

The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) says more than 50,000 North Korean workers are sent overseas to about 20 nations, including China, Russia, Mongolia, Malaysia, as well as countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Life overseas still tough

NKDB researchers have documented systematic abuse suffered by North Korean migrant laborers, who are being forced to work 12-hour days. Most are in construction, agriculture, manufacturing and other physically demanding and at times dangerous jobs. Many also live in crowded, unsanitary conditions in segregated compounds, where they are under constant surveillance and their movements are restricted.

"According to our research we found that these workers and laborers are working and living essentially in a North Korean society outside of the North Korean state," said Yoon Yeo-sang, the director of NKDB's North Korean human rights archives.

The North Korean migrant worker program earns \$200-300 million a year in foreign currency, most of which goes to the state. The human rights group says workers receive between \$50 to \$100 a month, which is about 10 percent of their monthly salaries.

Despite the low pay and poor conditions these overseas jobs are highly sought after in North Korea where poverty is widespread. Most applicants must also pay the state a fee of \$600 or more to enter the migrant labor program.

Nearly 90 percent of the money earned by overseas workers goes directly to the North Korean government, NKDB says, to circumvent U.N. sanctions imposed on the Kim Jong Un regime to prevent access to foreign currency to fund its nuclear weapons program.

Shaming host countries

NKDB says that North Korea seeks out countries for its migrant labor program that do not have a strong commitment to human rights or strong labor laws.

The group has focused recently on investigating migrant labor conditions in Mongolia and Poland, two countries that use large numbers of North Korean workers.

In these countries they saw little oversight from the host governments and a lack of accountability from the companies that employed the North Korean workers as subcontractors. In many cases they found that the workers did not even get the percentage of their wages they were due.

"They were working between the blurred boundaries of legal and illegal systems and because of their precarious status many of them were not paid," said NKDB's Yoon Yeosang.

United Nations efforts to improve human rights conditions inside North Korea have so far not been successful.

Last year the U.N. General Assembly voted to refer North Korea to the International Criminal Court based on a U.N. Commission of Inquiry report that documented a network of political prisons in the country and widespread human violations that include torture, enslavement, rape and murder. That resolution has been held up in the Security Council by North Korea's allies, Russia and China.

Improving worker conditions

These human rights activists still call upon North Korea to improve its labor practices but they also want to bring legal action or unwanted media attention to the host countries and companies that allow migrant labor violations to take place.

North Korea is not a signatory to the International Labor Organization that lays out worker rights and protections. But most of the countries that host its workers are signatories.

Tarek Chenti, the Deputy Representative of United Nations Human Rights Office in Seoul says the international community must hold hosting countries accountable for ensuring migrant worker rights and safety.

"Because not doing anything is also a violation. It is a violation by omission," Chenti said.

These human rights activists are calling for the establishment of human rights commissions in countries that don't have one, like Mongolia; stronger enforcement of

labor laws; creating migrant worker assistance centers; and measures to fairly resolve wage disputes in host countries.

North Korea human rights: Kim Jong Un's regime earns \$300m annually from forced labor

International Business Times (23.12.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1NC74vk> - At least 50,000 North Koreans are stationed overseas in some 20 countries as forced laborers and human rights advocates are calling for accountability. The involuntary workers bring in as much as \$300 million annually for the North Korean regime, according to various media reports on Wednesday. The workers are stationed in 14 sectors in more than 120 companies, including China, Russia, Mongolia, Malaysia and elsewhere.

The statistics were published by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights, a think tank in South Korea, in a stated attempt to shed light on the human rights situation of North Korean laborers overseas. Included was a list of companies that utilized the forced labor, many of which involve construction, agriculture, manufacturing and other physically laborious jobs.

"According to our research we found that these workers and laborers are working and living essentially in a North Korean society outside of the North Korean state," said Yoon Yeo-sang, the director of the research center, according to Voice of America.

According to the report, workers who were stationed in Poland and Mongolia were forced to hand over some 90 percent of their earnings to the North Korea's government. The laborers were able to keep 10 percent of their income, which comes out to less than \$100. They were also regularly subjected to systematic abuse and forced to work 12-hour days.

North Korea is not a signatory of the International Labor Organization which stipulates worker rights and protections, but many of the countries where their workers are hosted are signatories. Activists are calling on governments to be held accountable for hosting involuntary migrant workers.

"Not doing anything is also a violation. It is a violation by omission," said Tarek Chenti, a deputy representative of United Nations Human Rights Office in Seoul, South Korea, according to Voice of America.

Human rights organizations have repeatedly criticized the North Korean government for its dictatorial rule and systematic human rights violations. It is considered among the most oppressive regimes in the world. The government maintains secret labor camps within the country for government opponents, where torture and starvation are routine. Religion and free speech in the kingdom are virtually non-existent.

How bad is North Korea's food situation? Getting a grip on the numbers confusion

38North.org (09.12.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1NujByr> - When analysts attempt to make sense of data on North Korea, confusion is often the order of the day. This year has been no exception.

International aid agencies claim that a major drought has fomented a now-dire food shortage in the country, but in truth, the numbers don't seem to indicate that things are

any worse than normal. Agricultural reforms may be helping to alleviate some pain from the drought, but the new policies certainly don't seem to be working miracles.

Let's recap the developments over the past few months.

First, the drought swept across the Korean peninsula in the first half of this year, prompting calls for global action from North Korean authorities and international aid agencies. The DPRK, for its part, predicted the drought would be the worst in a century and lead to extensive food shortfalls.

Then the rains finally came, offsetting fears of imminent famine. In fact, a North Korean government outlet later claimed that harvests had increased. According to Chi Myong Su, director of the Agricultural Research Institute of the Academy of Agricultural Science, a North Korean government institute, "the effectiveness of field management system (pojon) from cooperative farm production unit system (bunjo) is noticeable and succeeded in increasing grain production despite the adverse weather conditions."

However, after a couple of months, aid agencies started to sound the alarm bells again. In October, the Food and Agriculture Agency of the United Nations (FAO) said that bad weather conditions could cause North Korea's staple food production to plummet by 14 percent this year.

According to the UN forecast, North Korea would produce 3.7 million tons of rice and corn in total this year, down from 4.3 million tons last year. Factoring in imports of about 500,000 tons, the FAO predicted a shortfall of 1.2 million tons in total.

However, as seasoned North Korea watcher Marcus Noland argues, observers may have overstated current levels of food insecurity in the DPRK. The current production figures are simply in line with normal conditions, and last year's figures were unusually high.

Some reports from inside North Korea seem to align with the more optimistic narrative. Daily NK reported on November 26 that small-plot farmers—that is, not the collective farms—have had a very good year. According to the report, the main reason for the strong harvests was not exclusively agricultural reform, but the availability of motorized water pumps and water turbines for irrigation. It is questionable whether this can really tilt harvests one way or the other. After all, the amount of North Korean farmers with means to purchase pumps and fuel is probably pretty low. But stories like this are important reminders of the multitude of factors that impact food production.

To better understand what is really going on, we must consider several questions. How bad was the impact of the drought? How does this year's food situation compare with that of the last few years? Do agricultural reforms seem to matter?

How Bad Was The Drought?

The drought was not as bad as observers had feared, but that does not mean it did not matter.

An FAO assessment from September this year claimed that early-season production of wheat and barley declined by 30 percent from last year, and the early-season potato yield was 20 percent smaller than in 2014. The rice bowl provinces of North and South Hwanghae were hit hardest by the lack of rain. Fortunately for food production, this year's flooding damage was mostly a local phenomenon in the country's north; only 700 hectares were adversely affected. The FAO brief does not give an outright estimate of this season's harvest, but subtracting the import requirement (421,000 tons) from the estimated need (5.49 million tons) gives an estimated total production of around 5.07

tons, in milled cereal equivalent terms. These are only very preliminary “guesstimates”, but are likely indicative of the current situation..

The FAO also asserts that there was a “drastic” reduction in food rations distributed in the lean-season months of July and August, when rations are already typically low. Individual daily rations were cut twice; first to 310 grams in early July (down from the 410 grams distributed throughout the first half of the year), and then to 250 grams in the second half of July. These lean-season figures are very low, as the FAO points out, but they have been worse in the past. (Ration sizes have presumably increased since September, when the agency made its estimates.)

It is important to remember that Public Distribution System (PDS) food rations do not represent the whole story, as most North Koreans probably rely on markets for a very significant part of their food consumption. Most survey studies indicate that the majority of food people consume comes from the markets and from other private sources, like kitchen gardens. In addition, there are likely to be disparities in food access between populations in different regions and in urban and rural areas. For example, the FAO recently estimated that the proportion of underweight children is twice as large in the countryside as it is in the cities. Vulnerable segments of the population are more dependent on the PDS, and thus more likely than the average citizen to be adversely impacted when harvests decline.

This year’s malnutrition figures are indeed dire, even though malnutrition has been improving since the late 1990s. The absolute number of undernourished people is expected to increase in the 2014-2016 period, though they would represent a slightly smaller portion of the overall population than in 2010-2012. As the FAO notes in its yearly report: “The only major exception to overall favourable progress in the region is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which is burdened by continuously high levels of undernourishment and shows little prospect of addressing its problems any time soon.” However, the proportion of undernourishment appears to be going down, so the trend still seems possible even though the situation is not stable.

The impacts of the drought seem to have been far milder than expected, but they are still significant. In order to fully understand North Korea’s current food situation, we need to view it in the context of the past few years.

How Does This Year’s Food Situation Compare to Previous Years?

This year’s decline in food production is not unusual. This past February, the FAO estimated that North Korea’s harvests had stagnated in 2014, reversing a trend of production increases that began in 2010. In that year, harvests went up by a modest 3 percent. In 2011, harvests increased by 8 percent, followed by a 10 percent increase in 2012. In 2013, the assessment team of the FAO and the World Food Programme noted an increase for the third year in a row, something that hadn’t occurred for many years.

Thus, this year is hardly unusual in terms of food production beyond the context of the past four years. Rather, the last several years seem to have been exceptionally good. Consider the following harvest figures, expressed in millions of metric tons of milled cereal equivalents:

Time period	2008/2009 [1]	2010/2011 [2]	2012/2013 [3]	2013/2014 [4]	2014/2015 (Feb. 2015 est.) ^[5]	2015/2016 ^[6] (Author’s own calculation, based on
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						preliminary FAO estimate)
Total harvest (million tons, est.)	3.3	4.5	4.9	5.03	5.08	5.07

Sources: Food and Agriculture Organization and author's own calculation. The 2015/2016 figure is a rough estimate based on North Korea's output versus its need as preliminarily projected by the FAO. All figures are expressed as cereal equivalent numbers of harvests.

We see a pattern of relatively wide swings over the past few years. The trend between 2010/2011 and 2013/2014 was one of growth, but those increases ended in 2014/2015. Seen in this context, this year's harvest does not seem unusually bad, though all available figures are uncertain estimates. Some experts were quick to claim that agricultural reforms implemented under Kim Jong Un were responsible for the harvest increases of the past few years. The overall pattern, however, calls that idea into question.

The most consistent factor seems to be the weather. Record years like 2013 saw unusually good weather, which is important to keep in mind when some claim that harvests increased as a result of agricultural reforms. In 2014, when harvests began to decline again, dry spells struck the country and precipitation was unusually low in the winter. North Korea was struck by a drought in 2012 too, but irrigation efforts partially mitigated its impact. This pattern highlights how vulnerable North Korea remains to weather changes, despite efforts to boost its resilience.

In sum, recent harvest yields show that while the drought seems to have caused a decline in food production, it is nowhere near the dire pre-2010 figures. One source with special insight into the situation on the ground in North Korea suggested to 38 North that the additional appeals from multilateral agencies this year may have more to do with donor fatigue than with the production decline.

Do Agricultural Reforms Matter?

The short answer is: it is hard to tell.

It is possible that the reforms increased agricultural efficiency and partially compensated for the effects of the drought. In other words, food production may have decreased, but it would have been worse had the reforms not been implemented.

It is worth remembering that neither the extent nor the content of the reforms is fully known. Instead, information remains anecdotal at best. Many of the claims about the success of the reforms seem to rest on anecdotal information from people who have visited collective farms in North Korea. For example, one source in frequent contact with aid workers visiting the country told 38 North that when a Western delegation visited a farm, officials told them that agricultural reforms were being implemented with success, counterbalancing some of the loss caused by this year's drought.

Such claims may very well be true, but without knowing how widely reforms have been implemented—they started out on an experimental basis in some localities—it is impossible to even "guesstimate" their full impact.

The past increase in food production also predated any agricultural reforms, calling into question whether policy changes have had a noticeable positive impact. Again, the weather seems to be the most important factor. Reforms were supposedly introduced in 2012, but by then, agricultural production had already been on the rise for several years. Foreign media outlets have closely associated the reforms with the rule of Kim Jong Un, so the North Korean regime may have touted the supposed success of the reforms partially to avoid undermining the leader's authority.

Conclusion

As is often the case with North Korea, these pressing questions lack clear-cut answers. The country seems to have been badly hit by the drought, but food production is still better than it has been in past years. The weather seems to be one of the most important factors for the fluctuations in food production. Agricultural reforms may have a marginal impact, but the unsatisfying truth is that we simply don't yet know their effect.

China urged not to repatriate North Koreans caught trying to escape

The Washington Post (21.11.2015) - <http://wapo.st/1SZp3wL> - Human rights advocates are urging China not to repatriate nine North Korean refugees, including an 11-month-old, who were caught while trying to escape the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong Un, warning of the harsh fate that awaits them if sent back.

North Korea is the most tightly controlled country in the world, with ordinary citizens banned from traveling abroad. Those who try to get to South Korea are considered traitors and, if caught and sent back, face severe punishment that almost always involves time in prison camps.

The nine North Koreans managed to cross from North Korea into China in the middle of last month and then made their way down to Vietnam, in hopes of eventually reaching South Korea, according to human rights activists.

This circuitous and highly dangerous route through Southeast Asia has become the most frequently used path to South Korea, where North Koreans can settle and become citizens in a familiar culture.

The group, which includes a teenager, was found during a random check on a bus in northeastern Vietnam — not far from the border with China — and handed over to Chinese police in Guangxi province.

Human rights advocates are asking China not to send the group back to North Korea.

"There is little doubt that if these nine refugees are forced back to North Korea, they will disappear into a camp system characterized by torture, violence and severe deprivation from which few emerge," said Phil Robertson, of Human Rights Watch. "If China sends them back to North Korea, they could well be sending them to their deaths."

The United Nations voiced similar concerns.

"There are fears that they may be — or may already have been — repatriated to [North] Korea, where they would be at risk of very serious human rights violations," Ravina Shamdasani, a United Nations human rights spokeswoman, said in a briefing in Geneva, according to Reuters.

Human rights groups report that the refugees were sent by train to the northern Chinese city of Shenyang last week and then transferred to Tumen, on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea. There is a large detention facility in Tumen where North Koreans are held before being repatriated.

This did not bode well, Shamdasani said. "This series of events strongly suggests that the group is at imminent risk of being repatriated to [North Korea] — and we are gravely concerned that they may already have been returned," she said.

Signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which include China, are banned from "refoulement" or returning refugees to a country where they could be persecuted.

But China considers such escapees from North Korea to be economic migrants, not political refugees, so it sends them back. There is no indication that Vietnam gave the group the opportunity to lodge asylum claims there, Robertson said.

The 2014 report by a U.N. Commission of Inquiry described the punishment meted out to North Koreans who try to escape.

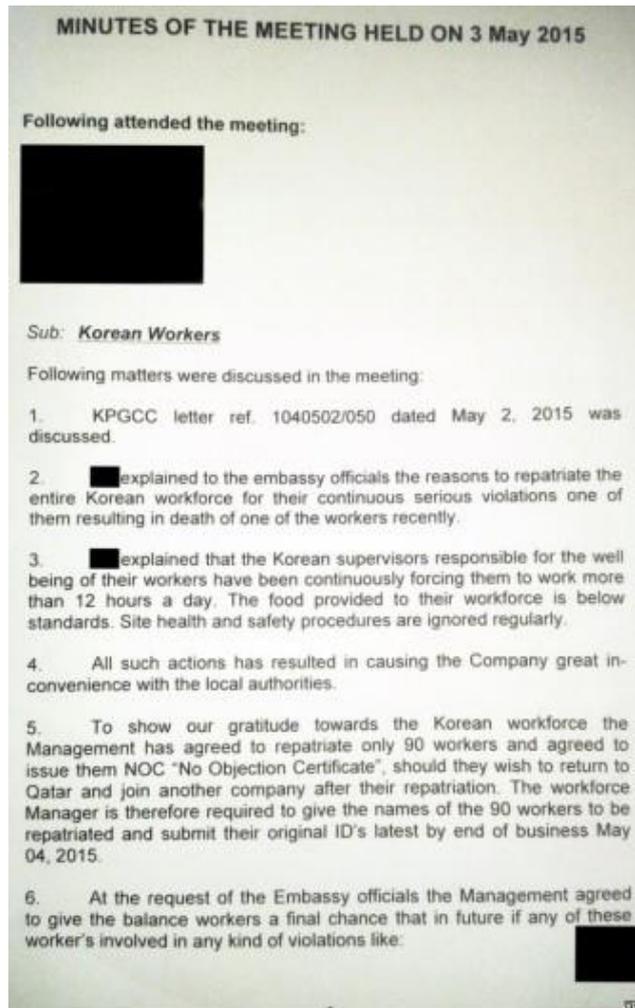
"When they are apprehended or forcibly repatriated, officials from [North] Korea systematically subject them to persecution, torture, prolonged arbitrary detention and, in some cases, sexual violence, including during invasive body searches," the commission's report said, noting that pregnant women were regularly forced to have abortions.

"Persons found to have been in contact with officials or nationals from [South] Korea or with Christian churches may be forcibly 'disappeared' into political prison camps, imprisoned in ordinary prisons or even summarily executed," the report continued.

The number of people successfully making the journey has dropped sharply in recent years, in large part because of a clampdown on both sides of the -China-North Korea border.

Exploitation of North Korean Workers in Qatar by Pyongyang: Good practice of a company

***Human Rights Without Frontiers hails the behavior of Construction Development
Company (CDC)***



Memo between construction company and DPRK embassy representative

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (22.10.2015) - According to Voice of America (VOA), **Construction Development Company (CDC)** fired 90 of its 192 North Korean workers on 7th May.

The decision by Qatar's Construction Development Company (CDC) came after repeated violations of local laws and regulations by the workers and their inhumane treatment by their supervisors, according to the minutes of a meeting between representatives of the company and North Korean officials that were exclusively obtained by the Voice of America (VOA) Korean Service.

The company asked the North Korean officials to provide the names of workers to be repatriated by 4th May. In the minutes dated on 3rd May, the company cited a series of violations and misconduct by the North Korean workers and their supervisors. The two-page document has names and signatures of four North Korean officials who participated in the meeting.

The company had initially tried to fire all the North Korean workers, but later reduced their number at the request of North Korean officials. The remaining workers were allowed to stay on condition that they do not take part in any rules violations, including misbehavior at the working site, non-compliance of health and safety procedures, working at other construction sites and disobeying local laws. The amount of the wages and the payment procedure were not part of the agreement.

This deal was however not respected by the North Korean side. At the end of August, CDC fired its entire North Korean workforce for repeated violations of the company's rules and inhumane treatment of the workers by their North Korean supervisors.

CDC took the action after learning that the employees who worked during the day at the CDC site were then sent by their supervisors to another construction site at night and were forced to overwork. The company also suspected that supervisors might have confiscated workers' wages.

North Korean workers are contracted with local construction companies through a North Korean recruitment firm in Qatar: **Genco**, created in 2010 from the merging of **Sudo Construction** and **Namgang Construction**. The firms are all managed by **North Korea's External Construction Bureau**. Some of the workers are soldiers dispatched by North Korea to earn cash. Sudo and Gunmyung were the first companies to import North Korean work force in Qatar in 2003; they were followed by Genco in 2010.

CDC builds luxury hotels and government facilities in Qatar, with its annual revenue amounting to \$300 million. The company requires all its employees and associate companies to adhere to international labor and ethics rules.

Human Rights Without Frontiers hails the efforts of Construction Development Company (CDC) to try to meet the international labor standards.

This year, there were about 3,000 North Korean laborers in Qatar. Some defectors said that their monthly salary was \$100 while Genco was receiving \$750 per worker, an amount that was transferred to Pyongyang.

North Korea first began sending overseas workers in 1967 after signing a bilateral trade agreement with Russia. Since then, it has expanded the scope of its labor exports to Africa in the 1970s, followed by the Middle East in the 1990s. According to research by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, a total of 45 countries have at one time employed North Korean workers and around 50,000 are currently working in at least 16 countries. The global income for the state is between USD 1.2 – 2.3 billion per year.

Korean families divided by war reunite in the North

Hundreds of South Koreans have begun meeting family members in the North in a rare reunion event for families separated by the Korean War. Some of those at the reunion saw family members for the first time in more than 50 years

BBC (20.10.2015) - <http://bbc.in/2miIkRb> - The reunion, comprising a series of meetings over a week, is being held at a Mount Kumgang resort, at the border.

Thousands of families have been apart with little or no contact since the war ended in 1953.

Reunions have been held sporadically since 1988 and depend on the state of relations between the two countries.

The last reunion was held in February 2014.

This year's meeting comes after an agreement in August that de-escalated tensions sparked by a border explosion that injured South Korean soldiers.

The meetings, organised by the Red Cross, are hugely popular with tens of thousands signing up, but few on each side get chosen and they tend to be elderly.

In South Korea participants are picked at random by a computer which takes into account their age and family background.

They also have to sit for interviews and take medical examinations to determine if they are fit to travel.

The first group of about 400 South Koreans, comprising of chosen participants and their accompanying family members, are taking part in the first round of meetings running from Tuesday to Thursday, reported Yonhap news agency.

Another 250 will attend the second round of meetings from Saturday to next Monday. Each round comprises of six two-hour sessions.

Many of those attending from South Korea are bringing gifts for their North Korean relatives such as clothes, food, toothpaste, and cash.

The two Korea remain technically at war as the Korean War only ended in an armistice.

The family reunions began in 2000 and have since been carried out sporadically.

But they depend hugely on the state of relations, and the North is known to have cancelled a few at moments of tension. The last was held in February 2014.

Lee Taek-gu is 89 years old and he will meet his sister who is 20 years younger. He last saw her when she was a tiny girl and he a young man who got on a boat to flee south, thinking he would come back after the war.

Since then, he has been writing letters to his parents knowing he would never send them because there is no postal service between the two halves of Korea. He wrote them as therapy for his grief.

He told the BBC he would simply thank his sister for being alive. They would talk about their parents who are now dead. He has got his best jacket cleaned and spruced up for the occasion and bought a smart new hat.

For more information, videos and pictures:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUonDo40trE>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZq3Lg_mWy8

<http://time.com/4080122/north-south-korea-reunite/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/korea-families-reunion_56260522e4b08589ef48cb4d?ir=World§ion=world&ncid=newsltushpmg0000003

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34572452>

<http://abc7.com/news/korean-families-divided-by-60-years-of-war-reunited/1042408/>

Exploitation of North Korean overseas workers by Pyongyang: A challenge and a test for the political will of the international community

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* (20.10.2015) - The regime of Kim Jong-un and his predecessors is known to be responsible for egregious violations of human rights and mass atrocities in North Korea as it has been revealed for decades by defectors and more recently by the UN Commission of Inquiry. All the efforts that have been deployed over the years by the international community to protect the North Korean citizens against their political leaders have proved to be largely unsuccessful.

What is less known is that North Korea has extended its totalitarian system beyond its borders and is exploiting its overseas workers in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and even in some EU member states with total impunity and the complicity of a number of UN member states and international business companies.

This paper will briefly:

- describe the main components of the exploitation system of North Korean overseas workers put in place by their own state;
- identify the means by which the international community can leverage influence to combat it successfully.

The egregious violations of the rights of the North Korean overseas workers by Pyongyang

North Korea first began sending overseas workers in 1967 after signing a bilateral trade agreement with Russia. Since then, it has expanded the scope of its labor exports to Africa in the 1970s, followed by the Middle East in the 1990s. According to research by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, a total of 45 countries have at one time employed North Korean workers and around 50,000 are currently working in at least 16 countries. North Korea's global income is between USD 1.2 – 2.3 billion per year.

How is the system of state exploitation organized by Pyongyang?

In short:

- North Korea's labor export is organized, managed, and overseen as a matter of state policy;
- North Korean workers are subject to constant surveillance by North Korea security agents, who are embedded with them, limiting any freedom of movement;
- Workers are not paid directly by their foreign employers but they receive their wage – between 120-150 dollars a month – from the North Korean state which gets much higher amounts from the employers;
- Earnings are not sent back as remittances, but appropriated by the state and transferred back to Pyongyang in the form of bulk cash, in clear violation of UN sanctions;
- Work hours range between 12 and 16 hours a day, sometimes as much as 20, with only one or two days of rest a month;

- Workers are not allowed to return to North Korea until their contract expires, which usually lasts three years.

The 2015 US Report on Trafficking in Persons says among other things about North Korea:

- Credible reports show many North Korean workers under these contracts perform labor under conditions indicative of forced labor, such as working excessively long hours in hazardous temperature with no pay for up to three years.
- North Korean government “minders” monitor workers’ movements and communications; they also confiscate passports and require workers to spy on each other.
- Thousands of workers are estimated to be employed in logging, construction, mining, garment, and agriculture industries.
- North Koreans sent overseas do not have a choice in the work the government assigns them and are not free to change jobs. They face threats of government reprisals against them or their relatives in North Korea if they attempt to escape or complain to outside parties.
- Reports show up to 90 percent of workers’ salaries are appropriated and controlled by the North Korean government
- Workers receive only a fraction of the money paid to the North Korean government for their labor, sometimes not until they return to the country.

It is first and foremost the role of the states and companies directly concerned by this exploitation to spontaneously take the necessary measures to put an end to it.

Whilst the international community has been unable to contribute successfully to the dismantling of the mechanisms of oppression and repression inside North Korea, UN member states, international trade union organizations, and human rights NGOs have at their disposal a wide range of instruments to eradicate the violations of the rights of the North Korean overseas workers. Until now, they had been widely unaware of the situation, and, therefore, very inactive, but now the time has come for them to show their will to take action.

Recommendations to the international community

1. Urge states as well as public and private companies making use of North Korean workers to strengthen the implementation of labor protection standards

The international community, including the EU and its member states, should identify the countries and companies that make use of North Korean workers and strongly urge them to ensure that:

- the labor contracts are in line at least with the local legislation and at best with the international standards;
- the passports and visas of the North Korean workers are not confiscated by their North Korean ‘supervisor’ or their employers and that their freedom of movement is not violated;

- basic living and working standards are met, at minimum, to the level stipulated in domestic labor laws;
- inspections of workplaces using North Korean laborers are regularly carried out;
- North Korean workers are paid directly instead of through the North Korean government or state enterprises;
- the North Korean supervisors do not function as a judicial police authority and are prosecuted in cases of abuse of power and exploitation

If states and companies fail to observe these conditions, human rights NGOs should publicize their names and raise this issue before the relevant international organizations:

- Special Procedures in the UN Human Rights Council
- UN Human Rights Committee
- UN Universal Periodic Review
- International Labor Organization
- European Court of Human Rights
- International Criminal Court

If they persist in abetting the human right abuses of North Korean laborers, international sanctions should be applied.

The purpose of this proposal is not to hinder North Korea's economic development but rather to ensure that the profits of labor are given to the rightful owners and that the rights of the North Korean workers are protected according to basic international standards of safety and dignity.

2. Monitoring of the situation by domestic and international human rights NGOs

Although there are currently 16 countries that are hosting North Korean laborers, there are prospects that this number will gradually increase over time.

Local human rights NGOs should monitor the situation of North Korean overseas workers in their respective countries and provide them legal or other forms of assistance. They should also publish reports, coordinate regionally, and solicit the support of international human rights organizations and trade unions.

3. In case of non-compliance with the international standards, the UN should extend its existing list of targeted sanctions to the organizers and beneficiaries of the exploitation of North Korean overseas workers

With the help of a group of experts, the UN should draw up a list of senior North Korean officials and entities involved in this exploitation that could potentially be subject to sanctions. Priority targets should be the heads of several political institutions in North Korea that have been found to be responsible for the exploitation of its overseas workers.

Targeted sanctions could include travel bans and asset freezes directed toward individuals committing human rights abuses and the imposition of stiff penalties, including financial sanctions, against those entities that provide support to these individuals.

The UN member states should implement such sanctions.

4. The EU should extend its restrictive measures in respect to the exploitation of North Korean overseas workers

The EU should check if any of its member states or EU-based private companies is involved directly or indirectly in the exploitation of North Koreans in Europe or abroad. If this is the case, the EU should act decisively in view of putting an end to this situation.

EU Delegations and Offices operating around the world as well as the diplomatic missions of EU member states should verify in the countries where they are located if North Korean workers have been or are being exploited.

As long as Pyongyang continues to exploit its overseas workers, the EU and its member states should:

- maintain strict implementation of UN sanctions as well as its own restrictive measures and report annually on their status;
- continue to pressure the North Korean leadership through its own institutional mechanisms (the EEAS, the EU-North Korea Political Dialogue, the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Korean Peninsula, etc.) to enforce the international human rights standards, respect its UN commitments, sign and ratify other relevant UN instruments.

Through its Delegation to South Korea in Seoul, the EU should:

- cooperate with the recently-established UN human rights field office in Seoul;
- work with South Korean institutions and NGOs to collect information and testimonies concerning the exploitation of North Korean overseas workers;
- issue periodic reports to relevant EU institutions in Brussels.

If all these actors of the international community show their determination and their political will to put an end to the exploitation of North Korean overseas workers by their own state, a strong political signal will have been sent to Pyongyang.

(*) Paper presented at the *4th KINU North Korean Human Rights Forum in Europe on North Korean Human Rights & the Role of the International Community on 19th October 2015 in Madrid*

Christianity was the only way out, says North Korean defector

Joseph Kim revered the Great Leader as a child, but on arriving in China he realised that if he embraced Jesus missionaries would help him escape

The Guardian (18.10.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1RPJX1v> - The first time Joseph Kim heard the words "Christian" and "church", he had no idea what they meant. He had never seen a church and Christianity was as unfamiliar to him in his famine-ravaged North Korea as Disneyland.

"Kwang Jin", a friend said to him, using the Korean name by which Kim was then known, "if you ever go to China, the churches will give you money."

To which Kim replied: "What's a church? Why would they just give you money?"

"Because they're Christians," the friend said.

"What are Christians?" Kim asked.

That Kim should have known nothing about Christianity when he was growing up in North Korea was hardly surprising. Born in 1990, the only belief system to which he was exposed as a child was reverence, mixed with fear, for the Great Leader.

When he was very young he was taught in kindergarten about the magical powers of Kim Il-sung, then supreme leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Kim learned that the dictator was the smartest man in the world and that he was able to fly around the countryside keeping watch over all his children.

But if the cult of the Great Leader left no room for Christianity, or any other organised religion in Kim's youth, the importance of money was most certainly not lost on him. Prolonged famine had struck the country when he was five, killing more than a million people and in effect turning Kim into an orphan. His father died of hunger-induced illness, his mother ended up in a North Korean prison camp, and his beloved sister was probably sold as a child bride in China.

As he describes in his memoir of becoming a defector, *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America*, Kim was driven to increasingly desperate measures to survive. He ate wild plants and raspberry leaves, snails and grasshoppers, lived by petty crime and joined a network of homeless thieves called the "gangster brothers".

Eventually in 2006, at the age of 16, he decided he had nothing left to lose and made the perilous journey from his town of Hoeryong in the north of the country across the Tumen river into China.

He remembered what his friend had told him about churches giving money, which chimed with what somebody told him as he knocked on doors in search of food inside China. "You must go to a Christian church," a Chinese woman said.

"How do I find this church?" he asked.

"Look for a cross," she replied.

His search took him to a number of churches in Tumen City, the Chinese town where he arrived close to the North Korean border, and through them he was introduced to a network of Chinese-Korean Christians who were to prove his salvation.

"If that hadn't happened, I don't know what other route I could have taken," Kim said in an interview with the *Guardian* in New York, where he now lives. "I didn't have any relatives or friends I could find inside China, so this was my only hope."

Unbeknown to Kim at that time, his connection with the Christians meant that he had entered the most sophisticated underground support network for North Korean defectors then in existence inside China.

Backed with money and logistical support from South Korean-based, largely Presbyterian, churches, an intricate system was in place for hiding away, and then providing escape routes, for people who had fled famine or persecution in the DPRK.

In Kim's case, he was sheltered in the home of a Korean-Chinese woman, aged about 75, whom he called Grandma. A woman of strong faith, she was a member of a South Korean church, which paid some of her rent and the expenses she incurred looking after North Korean defectors.

It was a dangerous arrangement. If Grandma had been caught harbouring Kim, she would have faced a 5,000-yuan (£520) penalty – an enormous sum for her. If Kim had been caught, he would have been deported back to North Korea, where his connection with Christianity would have been severely punished.

“Public execution would have been highly possible, but definitely I would have been sent to a prison camp back in North Korea,” he said.

The shelter and food that Kim received from Grandma and her Christian network did not come entirely without a cost. He was expected to embrace the religion. He attended Bible-reading lessons, and later Grandma took him to underground church services.

At first it was all gobbledygook to him. When he arrived in China from North Korea he was, he said, “nothing more than an animal who wants to live and have a bite to eat. There was nothing else. My primary concern was to find food. If you didn’t constantly put yourself first, you would die. So ethics meant nothing to me, it was nothing more than a word.”

He admits in the early days he was only interested in what Christianity could give him. “I was merely interested in the aid I could get from them. There was no sense of moral development.”

Over time, though, he did come to appreciate the lessons and to embrace the religion. The sacrifices made on his behalf by Grandma and other local Christians chimed with what he was reading in the Bible, and he started to understand the value of altruism.

“Grandma made a huge sacrifice and took great risks to help me. And that matched the story of Jesus I read in the Bible and I started to understand.”

But there was another sacrifice he found more difficult to accept. Early on in his contact with the Christians in China, he was told to change his name from Kwang Jin to the biblical Joseph Kim. He was shocked and offended by the demand.

“It was a mixture of anger plus sadness,” he said. “I literally gave up everything I had to survive. I gave up my personality. I gave up the pride of being human. I had nothing to tie me to my parents and my past life. The only thing that identified me was my name – and now I was being told to give that up too.”

After around three months living under Grandma’s protection, Kim was introduced to a non-religious group called Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), which works with defectors hiding in China and helps them seek asylum. LiNK facilitated his journey to the US consulate in Shenyang, and after four months there he was relocated to the US, where he has lived for eight years.

Today he is preparing to start as an undergraduate at Bard College, New York, studying political science. He describes himself as a Christian and belongs to a South Korean church in Brooklyn. “I’m not the most ideal Christian, but I am Christian,” he said.

Over time he has grown to appreciate Christianity as a loving, altruistic faith. But he has also wrestled with doubts about the religion and why he had to join it in exchange for food and shelter.

“I didn’t feel tremendous force to join the religion, but it’s also true that I didn’t have any other option. No one said to me, ‘By the way you don’t have to become a Christian to get help.’”

"One thing Christianity could do to help address the question is to say to North Korean defectors, 'It's totally up to you - whether you join the religion or not - we're going to help you regardless.' I think that could be helpful, but I don't know whether South Korean missionaries are prepared to do that."

At moments of extreme doubt, Kim wonders whether Christianity could be another form of indoctrination. "Even though no one forced me into Christianity, I definitely had internal pressure: if I didn't believe in God, would they still be helping me?"

He said he was still struggling with that moral conundrum. But he also remains enduringly grateful for the sacrifices made on his behalf by Grandma, and he deeply regrets that he has been unable to contact her since leaving China to thank her personally for the new life she gave him. "She played a huge role in my life - without her I wouldn't be here today," he said.

South Korean official: UN seeks new action over North Korea human rights

Voice of America (14.10.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1MEbmDk> - The United Nations is making a renewed effort to bring North Korean officials to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for human rights violations, a South Korean official told VOA on Wednesday.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said a resolution calling for the North Korean human rights situation to be referred to the ICC is being drafted at the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee.

The measure pushed by the United States, South Korea, Japan, and Britain is likely to contain key parts of a resolution passed by the U.N. General Assembly in December 2014, according to the official. The landmark U.N. resolution calls for the Security Council to consider referring North Korean human rights to the ICC. But, the U.N. action faced opposition by China and Russia, which have veto power on the council.

The new resolution is seen as another attempt by the U.N. to seek action against Pyongyang through the Security Council. Earlier this month, Marzuki Darusman, the U.N.'s special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, called on the U.N. body to take action.

"Efforts must be undertaken to ensure the accountability of those responsible for human rights violations, including through referral by the Security Council of the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court," Darusman wrote in a report.

The resolution being discussed also calls to support field offices activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The U.N. human rights office opened a field in Seoul in June to investigate the North Korean human rights situation. North Korea has made repeated threats against South Korea for hosting the office.

The latest U.N. resolution is likely to draw strong protests from Pyongyang, which rejects international criticism of its human rights record. The United Nations has adopted a human rights resolution against Pyongyang every year since 2005.

The U.N. move comes amid an emerging thaw in inter-Korean relations. Pyongyang did not fire a long-range rocket during the much-touted party anniversary last week despite widespread speculation that it would do so, fueling optimism that Pyongyang might refrain from provocative actions for now. Two Koreas are set for rare reunions of families separated by the Korean War next week.

Kim Jong-un's recipe for success: private enterprise and public executions

The Guardian (07.10.15) - <http://bit.ly/1ZauzBK> - Kim Jong-un, the third hereditary ruler of North Korea, gets a really bad press. He is widely seen as a capricious, overweight youngster, fond of executing his generals and threatening the world with war; ruler of an impoverished country ever on the brink of famine but equipped with nuclear weapons.

There is some truth in this description but it does not represent the whole story. He may have a penchant for executions, but Kim is also the first ruler of the dynasty to implement market-oriented reforms.

The oft-repeated cliché of North Korea as a “starving Stalinist country” is outdated – it is neither starving nor Stalinist. Experts agree that over the past decade the country has not only recovered from the disastrous famine of the late 1990s, but has also experienced significant economic growth. Pessimists put the annual growth rate at about 1.5%, while the optimists believe it may be close to 4%.

This growth was brought about, above all, by the emergence of the private economy. While on paper private entrepreneurial activities remain illegal, the law is seldom, if ever, enforced. As a result some North Koreans – the more entrepreneurial, lucky, well-connected and ruthless of them – have recreated the market economy from scratch. Nowadays, there are private mines, truck companies and oil refineries in North Korea.

Admittedly, the owner has to register the enterprise as state property, but this fiction misleads nobody. It is estimated that 30-50% of North Korean GDP is now produced by the private sector.

The presence of the new rich business people (many of whom are women) is much felt in Pyongyang and other major North Korean cities. They account for the majority of patrons in the upmarket restaurants popping up across the city. Although meals cost \$15 to \$25, roughly equivalent to the average family’s weekly or fortnightly income, these places are always crowded.

Property prices are going through the roof. A good apartment in Pyongyang costs about \$100,000, and the best homes go for \$200,000. Over the past 10 years, house prices in North Korea have increased tenfold. Technically, houses cannot be owned privately so people buy and sell “residence rights” only, but few see this as anything but a convenient legal fiction.

There is a spillover effect: while rich people buy houses and European cars, more and more ordinary North Koreans can afford meat at weekends and pure rice gruel every day.

All these changes began in the late 1990s but the late Kim Jong-il, the father of the current ruler, did not quite know what to make of the growing private economy. Sometimes he initiated crackdowns (always partial and never successful), while other times he grudgingly tolerated the changes. Kim Jong-un is different: he quietly encourages the market economy.

The greatest success of the young dictator has been the reform of agriculture, similar to what the Chinese did in the late 1970s. Fields, while technically state-owned, are given for cultivation to individual households and farmers work for a share of the harvest (30%-70%).

The results of the reforms were predictable: the past few years have seen record-level harvests, and North Korea is now close to self-sufficiency in food production. This year a major drought prompted concern but it now seems that farmers, working not for the party's glory but for their own gain, managed to fix the problem, and this year's harvest is going to be high – perhaps even a record breaker.

If plans for industrial reforms (decentralisation and partial privatisation of what is left of state industries) are taken into account, the general picture seems clear. Kim Jong-un wants to apply to his country a model of authoritarian capitalism, a so-called "developmental dictatorship". This model worked very well in Taiwan and South Korea and now is producing impressive results in China and Vietnam.

This is good news, and observers should not be surprised that recent polls among refugees from North Korea – a group not known for their sympathies towards the regime – indicate that Kim Jong-un is popular with his people.

In China, such changes were accompanied by significant political relaxation. North Korea is different: Kim's economic reforms, however beneficial, are unlikely to lead to more personal freedoms. If anything, the young leader is more repressive than his father.

North Korea has a problem not faced by China nor Vietnam: the existence of a rich twin state in the south. South Korea's per capita income is at least 15 times higher, while its population speaks the same language and is officially part of the same nation, which is supposed to eventually, somehow, unify. To put it in context, the per capita gap between the two German states in the 1980s was merely threefold.

This gap is the reason why the North Korean state has maintained a level of isolation no other communist regime could think of: even ownership of a tuneable radio is a crime. However, a relaxation could mean the populace learning about South Korea's unbelievable prosperity and doing what East Germans did 25 years ago in a rather similar situation.

This threat was well understood by Kim Jong-il, and was the major reason why he did not dare to launch reforms. His son made a different decision, but in order to stay in power he cannot afford any political relaxation, so economic liberalisation is now combined with public executions.

This gives Kim Jong-un the chance to succeed in reforming his country without being overthrown and lynched by a revolutionary mob. Alas, the price for this strategy, which makes perfect sense to the elite, will be paid by common people.

North Koreans continue to suffer human rights abuses, report says

Marzuki Darusman said political prison camp inmates, overseas North Korean workers and people with disabilities in North Korea are the most affected by the violations.

UPI (06.10.2015) - <http://bit.ly/21IWo2t> - North Koreans continue to suffer wide-scale human rights abuses, and the international community should do more to ask Pyongyang to bear responsibility, the United Nations special rapporteur on North Korea said Tuesday.

Marzuki Darusman told Voice of America that a North Korea human rights situation report filed with the 70th Session of the U.N. General Assembly noted ongoing abuses, including

summary executions, abductions, enforced disappearances and human trafficking still take place on a large scale.

The special rapporteur said political prison camp inmates, overseas North Korean workers and people with disabilities in North Korea are the most affected, Yonhap reported, and said all political prisoners and abductees should be released. He also said North Korea must permit freedom of communication. Separated families in the North and South should be allowed to use phone and email to communicate with each other, he said.

"North Koreans and their families, both at home and abroad, have suffered abuses for too long," Darusman said, according to South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo, He added U.N. member states should eradicate forced labor practices in their countries.

In September, [The Telegraph reported](#) in European member states Poland and Malta, North Korean workers were grinding away as "forced laborers," and a British human rights group had demanded an end to the practice.

Darusman said North Korea's human rights situation should be referred to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and that the international community should do more to protect the rights of ordinary North Koreans, by asking the perpetrators to bear responsibility for abuses. To that end, the U.N. General Assembly could adopt a North Korea human rights resolution in order to address the institutions and individuals responsible for crimes against humanity.

North Korea has slammed the U.N. for criticism of its human rights record and has said the evidence "is nothing more than lies from North Korean defectors, whose testimonies cannot be corroborated."

Malta urged to investigate use of North Korean 'forced labour'

Times of Malta (30.09.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1UJWCHn> - A British human rights group has accused Malta and Poland of employing "forced labour" from North Korea.

The two countries are the only EU member states in a global list of countries where firms have allegedly used North Korean workers provided by Pyongyang-sponsored work schemes.

The European Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea said Malta issued 93 visas to North Korean citizens since March 2013. They are understood to work for a Chinese-owned firm, the group said.

(It is not known whether this is a reference to Leisure Clothing, which was in the news last year for poor working conditions).

800 North Koreans are also believed to be working in Poland in shipyards and orchards.

The EAHRNK, which works with the North Korean diaspora around the world, and which compiled its research in conjunction with local labour organisations in Poland and Malta, said both countries' governments should investigate.

"The European Union has taken an active lead in pushing for greater international accountability and justice for North Korean human rights - but now it must look to its own shores," James Burt, the EAHRNK's research and policy officer told The Daily Telegraph.

"Forced labour generates hundreds of millions of euros for the North Korean leadership each year and this revenue is, most likely, invested in luxury goods, weapons production, and the maintenance of the most repressive regime on earth."

Disappearance of North Korean girl still a mystery, four years later

CNN (22.09.2015) - <http://cnn.it/1R8pPH8> - Four years ago, Mun Su Gyong's parents in Pyongyang received a letter from their daughter, colorfully decorated with pink hearts, embellished with cut-out photographs of her. Because the majority of the country doesn't have Internet access, North Koreans still mostly communicate the old-fashioned way, in pen and ink.

The letter is now one of their most precious possessions -- a keepsake in the way that an email never could be. It was the last they ever heard from their daughter.

In the letter, Mun, who was 20 at the time, told her parents she would be coming home soon. Three years before, they had been proud to hear that their daughter had been selected to work overseas in a North Korean state-owned restaurant in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Restaurants like these are important foreign currency earners for North Korea, which is cut off in so many ways from the international economy by harsh sanctions imposed on it due to its nuclear weapons program. The waitresses who work in these establishments are chosen for their beauty and their singing and dancing skills, but most importantly for their loyalty.

Disappeared

Weeks after writing that letter to her parents, saying she would be coming home in a matter of weeks and asking them to make preparations for her to attend university, Mun Su Gyong disappeared.

Co-workers, North Koreans, say regular customers who had befriended Mun abducted her.

The former manager of the restaurant, since closed, believes the men were South Korean spies who frequented the restaurant for two years posing as North Korean businessmen.

Witnesses provided to CNN by the North Korean government say the men forced Mun into a car and drove her away.

But a South Korean government official has called the claims "completely groundless."

Whatever the circumstances of her disappearance, Mun's family was devastated.

Pyongyang visit

CNN visited them in their Pyongyang apartment, where they keep her room like a shrine, with her belongings untouched. She had sent her favorite Snoopy stuffed toy home to her brother in advance of her return. "Every day I come home from work, I go to her room to see if anything has changed, if she has come home," her mother, Kim Sun Jong, tells us.

Kim Sun Jong, an artist, and her husband, Mun Sung Jin, a police officer, waver between floods of tears and fond smiles as they show us the many photos in their albums. They coo over pictures of their daughter as a child growing up. Memories most would share on Facebook today are still kept in photo albums in North Korea.

They were so proud when she was selected to work overseas, they say, even though that meant three or four years away from home, without home leave. Only the most trusted youth are sent to work abroad, they tell us. Even abroad, North Koreans live according to the communal, socialist values of their society. Their housing is provided by the state. They live, work and study together.

Her parents say Mun was a loyal socialist with a "clean heart." She even took time to dust off a street sign in Phnom Penh named after Kim Il Sung, the founder of North Korea who still holds the title "eternal president" more than two decades after his death."

She sent home pictures of herself, often entertaining restaurant customers with song and dance. She wore smart modern suits and traditional Korean dresses. She posed with the other young women she worked with.

Loyal and devoted

Her parents say she was loyal and devoted to her country, her family and her leader. The only thing that would keep her from returning to her homeland, they say, is abduction or deception.

Tens of thousands of North Koreans have made the risky journey to South Korea since the 1990s. Defectors in the South often say they are fleeing repression and poverty. The North Korean government says they are criminals, seeking to escape their past, or victims of human traffickers, duped into defecting and then forced to lie about the North in order to survive.

Mun's father says it never crosses his mind that she could have gone willingly. But whatever the truth of the matter, it torments her family. "The pain has never diminished," he says. "It has only increased in the past four years."

Her mother, Kim Sun Jong, looks into the camera and appeals directly to her daughter. "I will wait for you until the end of my life. I strongly believe you were deceived into going there. I trust you."

UN Human Rights Council panel addresses human rights violations

CSW (22.09.2015) - An unprecedented panel discussion at the UN Human Rights Council on 21 September focused on international abductions and enforced disappearances taking place in North Korea.

According to the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea, "well over 200,000 persons, including children, who were brought from other countries to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea may have become victims of enforced disappearance", from countries such as Japan, Romania, Netherlands, France and China.

The panel discussion was another indication of an increased international focus on human rights violations in North Korea following the publication of the report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on North Korea in February 2014. It concluded that the regime is committing crimes against humanity and widespread human rights violations including

murder, sexual violence, forced abortions, slave labour, torture and executions. The dire conditions in the country's network of prison camps, as well as enforced disappearances and abductions in North Korea have also been increasingly highlighted on international platforms.

In December 2014, the human rights situation of the country was added as a permanent item to the UN Security Council's agenda. In June 2015, the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) established a field office in Seoul to strengthen monitoring and documenting of human rights violations in North Korea. Furthermore, in September 2015 the BBC announced plans to start broadcasting a daily news programme into North Korea which will provide vital access to information to the people of one of the most closed and repressive countries in the world.

During the panel discussion, Marzuki Darusman, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK) called for the urgent establishment of an accountability structure to address human rights violations. "Justice delayed is justice denied. It is therefore of the greatest and immediate urgency that at this darkest hour the international community jointly acts," he said. In regard to the enforced disappearances and abductions, he argued that the most important task now is for the field office in Seoul to re-establish the exact figures on Japanese and other abductees. He also drew attention to the family reunification negotiations between DPRK and Republic of Korea (ROK) which will take place between in late October. Approximately 66,000 families living in DPRK and ROK need to be reunited.

Kwon Eun-kyoung from the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), said: "Putting aside the approximately 80 executions of high-ranking DPRK officials carried out since late 2011, I would like to shed light on the executions and immoderate punishments inflicted on normal residents in the DPRK. According to a 2015 white paper by the Korean Institute for National Unification [KINU], the number of public execution victims from 2000 to 2014 is 1,382 with 345 of those instances occurring from 2010-2014. Moreover, according a separate report released by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights, from 2000 up until now 1,409 people were killed through executions, with 231 of these cases occurring since 2010. Of the 231 victims, 64 were killed through closed executions. These White Papers reveal that for the last few years, executions for watching ROK videos and circulating them to other people have drastically increased."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Enforced disappearances and abductions violate the most basic human rights and count among the many crimes against humanity committed by North Korea. We urge the North Korean government to release the abductees immediately and provide international humanitarian actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access the political prison camps. We also urge all UN member states to find effective ways to end impunity and address human rights violations in the country. Education of and engagement with North Korean refugees living outside the country remains an important part of the solution. "

Breaking the wall of silence on North Korea

By Beatrice Basaldella for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (09.07.2015) - On 2nd July, a large audience attended an event at the European Parliament on 'Human Rights in North Korea: Voices from the Peninsula,' organised by the European Institute for Asian Studies in cooperation with MEP László Tóké. Defectors present at the hearing described atrocities and crimes against humanity that are systematically committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), still

ongoing and on a scale without parallel in any other country of the contemporary world.

In today's North Korea, asserted the speakers at the event, human rights are disregarded on a daily basis, even fundamental rights such as the right to food and right to life. Anyone can be arrested at any time under suspicion of disloyalty towards the regime and held on vague charges or for arbitrary reasons. Disappearances, harsh detention, torture and inhuman treatment are a daily reality in the country's extensive system of prison camps.

Such was the case for Gwang Il Jung, a former political prisoner at Camp 15 and defector. He is now the director of a non-governmental organisation called No Chain for North Korea. Jung was arrested and tortured for ten months – including beatings, electric shock, water torture and the infamous 'pigeon torture' – without ever knowing the reason for his detention. He finally ended the ordeal by confessing to the false accusation of being a spy. Jung said that his experience mirrors that which thousands of North Koreans endure on a regular basis.

For three years (April 2000 to April 2003), Jung was also imprisoned at Yodok, a political-penal labour camp located in South Hamgyong Province. He described the inhuman conditions to which the camp's prisoners were subjected: working 16 hours per day – from 4am until 8pm – on corn agriculture during summer and logging in winter. The strain was made even more intense by the meagre ration of food that was provided to prisoners: 200 grams of corn and beans per meal. If the inmate failed to complete his daily tasks, he would not receive his food ration.

Jung described two episodes which he personally experienced. One day a competition was set up by camp's officials: the stake was a kilo of corn cake. The winning group was the one that cut the most trees. Motivated by hunger and in order to win, some prisoners pushed the trees down the mountain, causing the death and injury of several prisoners in an opposing group. On another occasion, Jung passed by the 'death house,' where the bodies of the dead were stored. He heard the sounds of groans and suffering. Then he suddenly realised that many people placed in the death house were still alive and left there to die from the effects of pain and cold. 'That noise stayed with me all night long, (...) I couldn't sleep' he said.

On 21 March 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK to investigate reports of widespread and grave violations of human rights in the country with the view of ensuring full accountability for these violations, particularly for those which may be found to constitute crimes against humanity. At the end of the Commission's mandate in February 2014, a wide array of crimes against humanity and 'unspeakable atrocities' were reported to have been committed and continue in the country. The report urges an immediate end to these egregious violations.

Eun Kyoung Kwon testified at the event as representative of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea, saying that allegations of crimes against humanity have taken place in North Korea are now well documented and undeniable. Imprisonment, enslavement, killings, forced disappearances and other actions committed systematically and on a massive scale against a civilian population constitute crimes against humanity. 'People vanish with the dismantlement of camps,' she said. 'States in relations with North Korea have to ask the government where these people are.'

David Fouquet, a journalist and consultant on European-Asian relations, described the EU attitude towards North Korea as 'interested and engaged to a limited degree.' Stronger pressure and support coming from the 'outside world' could play a fundamental role in fostering change, he said. One key action would be to press the North Korean

government to allocate more money to developing the economy rather than reinforcing the military sector.

Young Hwan Kim, a researcher at the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, commented that 'North Korea shows no interest in engaging in a dialogue with the EU, but the international community has to show that North Korea is monitored and controlled in terms of human rights violations.'

The evidence against the DPRK government is compelling. Crimes, included crimes against humanity, have been committed. The world is now informed. The North Korean authorities have severely inhibited communication with the outside world, prompting activists to resort to other means for bringing news to the citizens of North Korea. Some have tried to smuggle literature and foreign newspapers, others have used radio, while others have even dropped anti-regime information via hot-air balloons. Still the fiction of government propaganda lives on and critics of the regime are swiftly and brutally suppressed.

North Koreans deserve much more than the obligation to venerate their oppressor, Kim Jong-un. We cannot be oblivious any more to the tragedy that is unfolding in the DPRK. It is time to seek accountability at the International Criminal Court for the atrocities committed in this country. It is our responsibility to break the wall of silence.

North Korea's expatriate labor needs ethical and financial limits

N. Korea increasingly relies on expat labor for hard currency

FreeKorea.us (14.05.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1Rjt2Gh> - A series of new reports suggests that the export of labor has become a major source of income for Pyongyang. The *Financial Times* cites an NGO estimate that the regime earns \$1.5 to \$2.3 billion a year from contract labor, in line with educated estimates of its annual revenue from missile sales (\$1.5 billion) or arms deals with Iran (\$1.5 billion to \$2 billion). (**Update:** Marcus Noland questions that estimate, and thinks the more likely figure is between \$150 million and \$200 million, which is still a lot of bling.) Ahn Myeong-Cheol, a former prison camp guard and leader of the NGO NK Watch, says that there are now 100,000 North Koreans working overseas, double the number it had posted overseas in 2012. Ahn believes North Korea is increasing its use of contract labor to compensate for arms revenue lost to U.N. Security Council sanctions. Marzuki Darusman gives the lower estimate of 20,000. In testimony appended to the end of this post, Greg Scarlatiou of the [Committee for Human Rights in North Korea](#) puts the figure at around 53,000. He also offers this very specific breakdown:

Currently, 16 countries reportedly host workers sent by the North Korean regime: Russia (20,000), China (19,000), Mongolia (1,300), Kuwait 5,000), UAE (2,000), Qatar (1,800), Angola (1,000), Poland (400-500), Malaysia (300), Oman (300), Libya (300), Myanmar (200), Nigeria (200), Algeria (200), Equatorial Guinea (200) and Ethiopia (100).⁴ Although North Korea is not a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO), all but two of the 16 states officially hosting North Korean workers are ILO members.

Scarlatiou cites [this study by the Asan Institute](#), which I haven't read, as the source of these figures.* For years, North Korean workers have been sent to stitch BMW headrests in Europe; build political monuments in Africa (at costs that are suspiciously above market value); mine coal in Malaysia; and cut down trees in the 40-below cold of Siberia

without proper winter clothing or safety equipment. Recently, Radio Free Asia reported that North Korean managers were deported for pimping out female textile workers in China. Needless to say, such working conditions fall far short of ILO standards.

Media scrutiny causes Qatar to fire N. Koreans over labor violations

Recently, Qatar became a target for criticism by human rights groups for using North Korean labor to build venues for the 2022 World Cup. Pressure on Qatar has led one construction company to fire 90 North Korean workers, or half of its North Korean workforce, for "a series of violations and misconduct by the North Korean workers and their supervisors." A North Korean company called Genco (not to be confused with that other shady front company of literary infamy) employs the workers.

"The Korean supervisors responsible for the wellbeing of their workers have been continuously forcing them to work more than 12 hours a day. The food provided to their workforce is below standards. Site health and safety procedures are ignored regularly," said one representative of the company, according to the document. [VOA News]

UPI adds that at least one North Korean worker died due to violations of safety standards. A hundred other North Korean workers continue to work at the company's construction projects in Qatar. The report did not make clear whether the projects were related to the World Cup. The *FT* found severe conditions at one Gulf State construction project, where North Korean managers forced their workers to keep toiling in the 120-degree heat, when foreign laborers from other Asian countries took shelter.

As a result of this scrutiny, North Korea has tried to impose information blockades around its expatriated workers. In April, Radio Free Asia reported that the regime has directed its workers to physically assault reporters who try to cover them, and smash their cameras. New Focus also reported that the regime had forbidden its workers in China, where dubbed South Korean dramas are broadcast regularly, from watching TV. Workers were previously "allowed some degree of freedom" if they moved in groups of two or three. Now, they're forbidden from leaving the work area except in groups of 15 or more. Those who break the rules are sent back to North Korea. God only knows what happens to them (and their families) after that.

Workers receive little or none of their "wages"

Whether you define North Korea's labor arrangements as slave labor may depend on how you define the term, and on the circumstances of each project. How much of their wages North Korean overseas laborers get to keep varies from project to project:

Current and former North Korean overseas workers describe how the vast majority of their nominal wage is lost to management fees and contributions to the ruling Korean Workers' Party. Their testimonies suggest a common system where managers agree to send a set monthly sum back to North Korea. If funds are short, the workers may be denied their wages or made to contribute to the remittance.

Yet workers can still earn \$1,000 for a year's work — a significant sum in North Korea, where most rely on the black market for sustenance and where bribery can be a crucial means of obtaining professional or other opportunities, such as securing education for their children. "The bribes to get into a good university are expensive — Kim Il Sung University is about \$10,000," says one former overseas worker. [Financial Times]

In some cases, defectors reported that they were left with nothing after party contributions were deducted; their bosses told them to be thankful they got two meals a day. The *FT*'s sources reported that they received either a small percentage of their nominal wages, or in one case, most of a \$4-a-month pittance. One said that the money

was enough to buy a decent apartment at home. Another, quoted in *The Chosun Ilbo*, said he was allowed to keep \$100 out of a nominal salary of \$750. The fact that North Korean workers in Muslim countries are regularly caught bootlegging alcohol suggests that their take-home earnings are insufficient to feed themselves, and their families. At Kaesong, arguably the most-scrutinized of all these arrangements, it still isn't clear whether the workers receive any cash wages at all.

Defenders of these labor-export arrangements argue that the North Korean workers there earn more and live better than those who remain behind, but the same justification might also be true of a child prostitute in Cambodia, or other human trafficking victims of any number of nationalities and circumstances. It still doesn't justify exploitative and dangerous working conditions, which are harmful to the North Korean workers, to workers in the host countries, and ultimately, to those imprisoned inside North Korea by a system perpetuated by exploitation.

Toward a More Ethical Model of Engagement

There are two possible approaches to this problem. One approach is suggested by the conduct of the Qatari firm that fired half its North Korean work force, and warned that the rest would be fired if they failed to comply with labor standards. In [this 2014 paper](#), Marcus Noland argued that Kaesong and other consumers of North Korean labor should agree to a code of ethics, akin to the Sullivan Principles, which were used to pressure South Africa to treat its African work force more fairly. But as Noland notes, the adoption of the Sullivan principles "did not occur in isolation;" companies adopted them under the threat of boycotts, divestment campaigns, shareholder resolutions, and eventually, U.S. sanctions laws. Users of North Korean labor must also comply with the financial transparency requirements of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2094, which prohibits the provision to North Korea of economic resources that could be used for prohibited weapons programs.

If users of North Korean labor agreed on a similar code of conduct, there would be far fewer objections to these arrangements, and the balance of equities in this debate might shift. That code would have to include basic worker safety protections, and guarantees that the workers would receive, spend, and repatriate a living wage. The regime could receive the remaining proceeds to purchase food, medicine, and other humanitarian needs and services in kind.

Because moral suasion doesn't work on everyone, standards that conflict with profit motives need hammers. In the case of South Africa, the hammers included the fear of reputational harm, and eventually, sanctions. Under Section 104(a)(1)(F) of the North Korea Sanctions Enforcement Act, those who engage in transactions in forced labor or human trafficking would be subject to the blocking of their assets in the dollar-based financial system.

Greg Scarlatoiu's testimony here: [Testimony of Greg Scarlatoiu Final](#)

North Korea Defence Chief Hyon Yong-chol 'executed'

BBC (13.05.2015) - North Korea's Defence Minister Hyon Yong-chol has been executed for showing disloyalty to leader Kim Jong-un, South Korea's spy agency has told parliament.

MPs were told Mr Hyon was killed on 30 April by anti-aircraft fire in front of an audience of hundreds, the Yonhap news agency reports.

It said Mr Hyon had fallen asleep during an event attended by Kim Jong-un and had not carried out instructions.

South Korea said a senior military officer was also killed.

The news comes weeks after the reported execution of 15 senior officials.

Among them were two vice-ministers who had challenged Mr Kim over his policies and members of an orchestra, the South's National Intelligence Agency (NIS) said at the time.

Mr Hyon is believed to have been a general since 2010, though little is known about him. He served on the committee for late leader Kim Jong-il's funeral in December 2011, an indication of his growing influence.

He was appointed defence minister last year. NK News said he [last appeared in state media](#) a day before the alleged execution date.

Last month, he travelled to Moscow to represent North Korea at a regional security conference.

Mike Madden of North Korea Leadership Watch told the BBC that if true, the execution was "entirely a demonstration of power and authority".

"This is indicative of Kim Jong-un's impulsive decision-making", he said, and a sign of a leader who is "not feeling secure".

Also executed, according to South Korea, was Ma Won-chun, a lieutenant-general and architect who masterminded the building of a new ski resort in 2013.

Reports had said Mr Ma was in charge of North Korea's finances.

Mr Kim has conducted a series of purges of close officials since becoming North Korea's leader.

The most notable was his uncle, Chang Song-thaek - once the country's second-most powerful figure.

He was arrested in December 2013 in front of a party meeting, found guilty of treason and immediately executed.

There have been reports before of North Korea using heavy weaponry in executions, including mortars.

Last month, a rights group [released satellite images](#) it said showed unusual activity on a small arms range at the Kanggon army training area in October 2014.

The US-based Committee for Human Rights in North Korea said the images showed large weaponry facing a very close target, a viewing area and several passenger vehicles.

It said the "most plausible explanation" for the image was a "gruesome public execution" by anti-aircraft fire.

Kim Jong Un Executed 15 Officials This Year, South Korea Says

AP (29.04.2015) - <http://huff.to/2mY1m2f> - South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers on Wednesday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ordered the execution of 15 senior officials this year who were accused of challenging his authority.

Lawmaker Shin Kyoung Min said National Intelligence Service chief Lee Byoung Ho also told legislators in a closed-door briefing that Kim appeared likely to visit Russia next month to attend the 70th anniversary of its victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

Shin said Lee didn't reveal how the intelligence agency obtained the information. The agency declined to confirm the comments when contacted by The Associated Press.

Since taking over North Korea's leadership after the death of his father Kim Jong Il in 2011, Kim has removed key members of the old guard through a series of purges. The process was highlighted by the 2013 execution of his uncle, Jang Song Thaek, for alleged treason. Jang was married to Kim Jong Il's sister and was once considered the second most powerful man in North Korea.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the Seoul-based University of North Korean Studies, said the purges underline Kim Jong Un's inexperience as a young dictator who is struggling to find effective ways to control his regime.

Lee told the lawmakers that a North Korean official with a rank comparable to a vice Cabinet minister in the South was executed in January for questioning Kim's policies on forestation, Shin said.

He said another North Korean official of similar rank was executed in February for resisting Kim's plans to construct a new building in the shape of a flower named after his grandfather, North Korean founder Kim Il Sung, Shin said.

Shin said the agency also believes that North Korea used a firing squad in March to execute four senior members of Pyongyang's famous Unhasu Orchestra on charges of espionage which Lee did not detail.

Lee told the lawmakers that North Korea has yet to book a hotel in Moscow for Kim's possible visit, but that the country's embassy is large and well-equipped enough to accommodate him, Shin said. It would be Kim's first overseas trip since taking power. South Korean President Park Geun-hye has decided not to attend the May 9 event in Moscow and plans to send an envoy instead.

The South Korean spy agency has a spotty record of tracking developments in North Korea. Information trickling out of the highly secretive state is often difficult to confirm.

In an intelligence success, the agency correctly said that Jang had likely been dismissed from his posts before North Korea officially announced his arrest.

However, it received heavy criticism when its director acknowledged that it had ignored intelligence indicating North Korea's impending shelling of a South Korean island in 2010. It also came under fire because of reports that it first learned of the 2011 death of then leader Kim Jong Il more than two days after it occurred when state media announced it to the world.

North Koreans working illegally in Nepal – paper

Fifty four North Korean workers helping with tunnel blasting for a hydroelectric plant

NK News (11.02.2015) - <http://bit.ly/22y08cH> - Fifty-four North Koreans are currently working illegally in Nepal, helping with blasting work on a tunnel for a hydroelectric power plant, according to Nepalese media.

The article from the Annapurna Post claims that the DPRK employees have experience working with explosives due to their time in the Korean People's Army (KPA).

The North Korean citizens have been in Nepal for a month and are currently working illegally on tourist visas, which could be a relatively new development for North Koreans working abroad. Previously, the North Korean government secured the necessary visas for overseas workers.

"I guess both Nepal and North Korea tried not to be criticized by the international community, as these days, the North Korean overseas workers' human rights situation has been revealed," Shin Chang-hoon, director of the Center for Global Governance at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies told NK News.

"As they are not legal workers, their salary must be lower than usual, and their human rights situation could be worse too," said Shin, who has authored a report on North Korean overseas labor.

A representative from the Nepalese Foreign Ministry said that they were aware of the media reports and were investigating, but was not authorized to give further comment.

The article adds that the North Koreans are working under difficult conditions with few safety measures in place. The new hydroelectric plant is being constructed in Nepal's Sindhupalchok region where 150 people were killed last year during a landslide.

North Koreans workers are often sent to work in dangerous environments abroad. Last November a DPRK citizen was killed during a tunnel collapse in a Malaysian mine, with another six sent to hospital.

Shin's report for the Asan Institute said there are approximately 50,000 North Koreans working in foreign countries. The report established that DPRK citizens working abroad did not have standardized labor contracts and that the work was often not voluntary.

It is widely believed that North Koreans working in foreign countries are not paid directly, with their wages instead given to the DPRK government, who issue small stipends for daily expenses.

Last month, it was reported that North Korean workers had made it as far as Malta, where they were employed in a textile factory making clothes for many top European brands.

Update: Twelve North Koreans to join Leisure Clothing despite 6,500 Maltese unemployed

Independent (07.01.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1B1IO1q> - While the number of registered unemployed stood at 6,501 in November last year, Leisure Clothing is still seeking foreign help and is set to take on an additional 12 North Koreans.

Currently, two Chinese directors of Leisure Clothing are facing charges of human trafficking for exploitation purposes and breaching labour laws.

A Leisure Clothing spokesperson confirmed to this newsroom that the 12 North Korean workers are currently awaiting clearance from the Employment Training Corporation (which is tasked to assess whether permits should be issued on labour market grounds) and the Maltese embassy in Beijing.

As soon as they are given the all clear they will take up employment at the Bulebel factory.

"The clearance is imminent," the spokesperson said, while confirming that the workers will be given a three-year contract.

Presently, the majority of the workers at the factory are Chinese but the factory also employs Maltese workers along with a small number of Vietnamese and one North Korean worker.

The LEAP programme

The move to approve further 'cheap labour' workers from Asia seems to be in direct conflict with a government scheme called the LEAP project which aims to create occupational opportunities for disadvantaged Maltese that are at risk of poverty. The fact that the local authorities are still issuing work permits for foreign nationals begs the question as to whether Maltese workers haven't the skills to take up such jobs or if employers are not working hard enough to attract local workers to address labour shortage concerns.

Worthy of note is that it is close to impossible for North Korean citizens to freely travel around the country, let alone travel abroad. It has been stated in Parliament that the Maltese embassy in Beijing has given Maltese (Schengen zone) visas to 55 North Koreans since March last year.

In an interview with this newsroom, the management of Leisure Clothing had said that it would not be employing more Vietnamese workers since they are not as skilled as Chinese workers.

It argued that the Vietnamese were not earning as much as the Chinese due to their poor skills which reflected their salaries, the majority of which is based on performance bonuses. Maltese Leisure Clothing workers, on the other hand, have fixed bonuses.

Leisure Clothing says it withheld passports of workers out of fear they would flee to other border-free Schengen zones

Asked why the company held onto the passports of their Asian employees, Leisure Clothing said that it used to withhold passports of its foreign workers since it feared that such workers could take advantage of other border-free Schengen zones and escape from Malta and "if this were to happen, the company would be held accountable". Asked

if it still withholds passports of workers, the company emphasised that it has stopped doing so.

When asked if it stopped withholding passports of workers after the case came to light, Leisure Clothing insisted that it had long been refraining from doing so.

"The company feels that workers who would like to stay on can do so and others who do not wish to can freely leave the company."

However, this newsroom pointed out to Leisure Clothing that in the past, the company did keep hold of its workers' passports. The company said that it did so only until residents' permits of the workers are cleared. Questioned if it employed persons without a work permit until it is issued, the spokesperson denied it is the case.

"It is illegal to employ persons without the employee having the relevant permit in hand beforehand," the spokesperson said.

In court, a number of Vietnamese Leisure Clothing workers and one Chinese worker claimed that on their arrival to Malta, representatives of Leisure Clothing asked them for their passports. Some of the Vietnamese workers at Leisure had reportedly tried to escape from Malta using false documents since their passports had been sequestered by the company at the time. According to the prosecuting police inspector's court testimony they did not ask for their passports back because they did not want to show their employer that they were leaving. They were scared and were being exploited, the inspector continued.

Since the Employment and Training Corporation is the entity that processes applications for the issue of employment licences (previously known as work permits) with regards to foreign nationals to be employed in Malta it states on its website that if you are not a citizen of an EU country, you need an employment licence in order to be able to work in Malta. EU nationals (except citizens of Croatia), EEA and Swiss nationals do not require an employment licence to work in Malta.

Employment licences must be applied for by the employer and not by the jobseeker. Such work permits are issued to employers wishing to engage foreigners for a determined period and for a specific purpose, only after it has been ascertained that every effort has been made to engage a suitable Maltese citizen.

Leisure Clothing says foreign workers employed according to quota established under PN government

In reaction to our story published today, Leisure Clothing shop steward Josephine Scerri said that the 12 Koreans would be replacing the Vietnamese former workers and their potential employment is in accordance with an agreement signed by a PN-led administration in 2010, specifically by Brian Magro, who was the head of secretariat of that time of the ministry responsible, with a quota of workers, both foreign and local, agreed upon by the company and the same government.

"The Employment and Training Corporation will only grant and issues work permits according to the quota and it has been customary that the same ETC checks the quota on a regular basis.

"For your information, a fine-tuning of the agreement based on the same principles that was signed by Mr Magro was recently reviewed by the present government last year," the company said.

The company added it will also be issuing a call for applications to recruit local workers on the shop floor as well as in the administration department next month.

The company also highlighted that several calls for applications have been issued in the past but hardly any Maltese nationals applied for the jobs.

The quota Leisure Clothing refers to is reportedly four foreign nationals to one Maltese worker but the fine-tuned agreement has increased the ratio to five foreign nationals against one Maltese worker.
