

Table of Contents

- ***Seoul in aid of food-starved North***
- ***Seven detained North Korean defectors in China face repatriation***
- ***Talking to North Korea: Ending the nuclear standoff***
- ***Pyongyang informed the UN that it is facing a 1.4 million tonnes food shortfall***
- ***Dutch shipbuilder in dock over North Korean's Polish slave claims***
- ***North Korea slams UN rapporteur over human rights comment***
- ***NK diplomat in Italy unaccounted for since leaving NK embassy in November***

Seoul in aid of food-starved North

Asia News (15.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Q4aDkZ> - **The South Korean government takes up UN agencies appeal The Unification Ministry: "Food aid is an obligation, both from a humanitarian perspective and as a compatriot". Last year, North Korean agricultural production reached its lowest level since 2008. 40% of the population is in urgent need of food.**

South Korea believes that [food shortages in North Korea](#) are serious and that Pyongyang needs external assistance, despite media reports that rice prices are falling, says Lee Sang-min, spokesman for the Unification Ministry in Seoul.

Some media reports say that in recent times the cost of cereal in North Korean markets is dropping, suggesting that the country could avoid the food crisis feared by United Nations (UN) agencies. But Seoul denies the rumors. "We recognize the assessment made by the World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as official indicators and targets," says Lee Sang-min.

"Given the nature of the North Korean regime, it is thought that there are many limits to estimating the food situation there with (market) indicators other than official prices or those provided by official organizations," he added. "Our stance remains unchanged that it is necessary to provide food from a [humanitarian and compatriots' perspective](#)".

Based on a visit to North Korea earlier this month, the WFP and FAO reported that last year's agricultural production in the country reached its lowest level since 2008, adding that around 10 million people, accounting for around 40% of the population, are in urgent need of food. Earlier this week, WFP executive director David Beasley expressed serious concerns about North Korea's food situation and urged Seoul to make additional donations.

Seven detained North Korean defectors in China face repatriation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Talking to North Korea: Ending the nuclear standoff

Author: Glyn Ford. Glyn Ford is Director of Track2Asia and a member of the Labour Party's International Commission.

Pluto Press (09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2XaIprP> - Despite recent attempts at negotiation, the attitudes of both Kim Jong Un's regime and the West seem unchanged. North Korea is still shrouded in mystery and there are no clear plans for the future. Can we trust either side to bring about peace? And if so, how?

This provocative insider's account blasts apart the myths which paint North Korea as a rogue state run by a mad leader. Informed by extraordinary access to the country's leadership, Glyn Ford investigates the regime from the inside, providing game-changing insights. Acknowledging that North Korea is a deeply repressive state, he nonetheless shows that sections of the leadership are determined to end their isolation.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction: The Pyongyang Paradox

- Nukes and Missiles
- International Relations
- Is There a Settlement to Be Had?
- Structure

PART I ROOTS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING NORTH KOREA'S HISTORY

Chapter 2: Drawing the Iron Curtain

- Geography
- The Yanks Arrive
- Colonial Consequences
- Pre-War War
- From Civil War to Cold War
- The Never-Ending End

Chapter 3: Kim's Korea

- Divide and Rule: The Intra-Party Struggle
- The Kim Cult
- The Economy Takes Off
- The Welfare State
- Alone Abroad
- The Third Way
- Kim's Legacy

Chapter 4 Famine, Markets, Refugees, and Human Rights:

- The Kim Jong Il Era
- The Famine
- The Emergence of Markets
- Kim Jong Il Steps Up
- Defectors, Refugees, or Migrants?

PART II CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Chapter 5: Kim Jong Un

- Emerging Capitalism
- Some Are More Equal than Others
- Investment and Special Economic Zones
- Energy and Mining
- Agriculture, Nutrition, and Industry

Chapter 6: Daily Life in North Korea

- Transportation
- Education: Shaping the Nation
- Controlling the Nation
- National Health
- Crime and Punishment

PART III THE DIPLOMATIC STAGE

Chapter 7: The Nuclear Factor

- Military Perception
- How Did We Get Here?
- North Korea's Nuclear Tests
- Missile Trade
- Star Wars
- Impact and Solutions
- Relations with South Korea

Chapter 8: Foreign Affairs: Between Rapprochement and Standoff

- Japan
- China
- United States
- United Nations
- European Union

Chapter 9: Conclusion – After Singapore

- Between Washington and Beijing
- Where Can It All Go Wrong?
- Another War Is Possible
- The Prospects for a Settlement

Pyongyang informed the UN that it is facing a 1.4 million tonnes food shortfall

In January daily rations were cut from 550 to 300 grams per person per day. In 2018, food production was 4.95 million tonnes, 503,000 less than in 2017. North Korea blames UN sanctions for negatively impacting its agricultural sector. A second Trump-Kim summit is set for five days from now, centred on economics and denuclearisation.

AsiaNews (22.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2SUnhrl> - New York: North Korea has warned that it is facing a food shortfall of 1.4 million tonnes in 2019 and has been forced to almost halve rations, blaming high temperatures, drought, floods and United Nations sanctions.

The North Korean mission to the United Nations released a memo to the world body ahead of a second summit next week between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi (Vietnam) on 27-28 February following the historic Singapore agreement eight months ago.

According to observers, the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and North Korea's economic development will be at the centre of the talks between the two leaders.

The UN Security Council unanimously imposed sanctions on North Korea in 2006 in a bid to choke off funding for its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

North Korea blames sanctions for restricting the delivery of farming materials and hindering fuel supply for the agricultural sector.

"The DPRK government calls on international organizations to urgently respond to addressing the food situation," read the North Korean memo.

It goes on to say that local food production last year was 4.951 million tonnes, 503,000 tonnes less than in 2017. The United Nations confirmed these figures as official government data provided at the end of January. The month before, North Korea admitted shortages in agricultural production.

North Korean authorities said it would import 200,000 tonnes of food and produce about 400,000 tonnes of early crops, but that it would still be left with a gap and that from January it would cut daily rations from 550 grams to 300 grams per person.

UN officials and aid groups in North Korea are consulting with the government to "further understand the impact of the food security situation on the most vulnerable people in order to take early action to address their humanitarian needs," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

Dutch shipbuilder in dock over North Korean's Polish slave claims

A North Korean man is suing a Dutch shipbuilder he accuses of profiting from slave labor when he was employed in a Polish shipyard. The first case of its kind, his lawyers hope it will open up more such cases.

By Jo Harper

Deutsche Welle (14.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2X0tW1T> - The first case in the Netherlands of worker exploitation involving a Dutch company for alleged crimes committed outside the country could be nearing an end in the coming weeks, lawyers said, and if successful may open the door to more such cases.

Barbara van Straaten, the lawyer representing a North Korean worker, said Dutch law criminalizes the act of profiting from exploitation. The name of the Dutch shipping company sued by the worker couldn't be disclosed for safety reasons, she added. Under the country's anti-trafficking law, offenders can be jailed for up to 18 years and face fines of €83,000 (\$95,000).

The plaintiff claims he was sent to Poland by the Pyongyang regime and forced to work 12-hour days for low wages in awful conditions. The lawyer did not say when this happened. Van Straaten's Amsterdam-based law firm, Prakken d'Oliveira, said the North Korean worked for the Polish company Crist. Crist received financial assistance from the European Regional Development Fund, a loan of €37 million in 2009.

Not a great precedent

The company first came under the spotlight in 2014, when a North Korean worker hired through a temporary Polish work agency called Armex died in an incident at the Crist shipyard.

The welder died when his clothes caught fire and was burned alive. Polish labor standards officials concluded he had been wearing flammable clothing provided by Armex, but were unable to prosecute as the man's documentation described him as self-employed and therefore outside Polish jurisdiction.

"We are not confident the Polish authorities would take this case as seriously as the Dutch one," van Straaten told DW. She said Polish labor authorities had failed in a previous case to prosecute a company where a North Korean worker had died in an accident at work, referring to the 2014 incident.

In 2007, Polish businesswoman Cecylia Kowalska set up Armex in Gdansk supplying electrical and welding services to local shipping and construction industries, and told reporters in November that when asked if she could manage 10 North Korean welders, her company took on the job.

She later began supplying North Korean welders to two other shipyards, run by Crist and Nauta, both companies that make war vessels for NATO members. A Polish labor inspection in February 2016 found 19 North Koreans working in a shipyard owned by Nauta, located next to the Crist shipyard.

Poland's online court register shows that Armex went into liquidation last year.

Crist denies culpability

Crist spokesman Tomasz Wrzask told DW he was not aware of the case or if Crist was involved. He told reporters in November that the shipyard previously worked with Armex, but ended collaboration in the summer of 2016.

"Armex had all the necessary permissions to operate in the EU and Poland and was under the supervision of Poland's National Labor Inspectorate. We had no reason for suspicion,"

Wrzask said then, adding it was an "outrage" that Crist's name had been made public while the Dutch shipbuilder was not identified.

Van Straaten noted that North Korea was not party to the dispute which was directed at the Dutch shipbuilder. "This opens the possibility to hold those companies accountable which are not direct perpetrators in the labor exploitation, but which nonetheless knowingly profit from this exploitation, gaining high profits in the West at the expense of workers from developing countries," she said.

The law firm now hopes that the Dutch authorities have requested a European Investigation Order. An admission of guilt and a fine are among the outcomes the North Korean hopes for from this case, his lawyer said.

Damning evidence

Crist's involvement with North Korean laborers as well as conditions faced by North Korean laborers in Poland and Europe were detailed in a report published by the Leiden Asia Centre by Remco Breuker and Imke van Gardingen. Law firm Prakken d'Oliveira cited the research conducted in the "Slaves to the System" report as central to the case.

A Global Slavery Index published in July estimated that 40.3 million people globally were subjected to modern slavery in 2016. North Korea's Kaesong industrial complex is frequently criticized for keeping workers under slave-like conditions

The researchers identified three North Korean firms as providing laborers that were assigned by two Polish companies, Alson and Armex, to pass on to firms that needed cheap labor.

An earlier report by the Leiden Asia Centre found that as many as 800 forced laborers are in Poland working in the shipbuilding and construction sectors.

The 2016 report titled "North Korean Forced Labor in the EU, the Polish Case," showed that Armex had hired workers supplied by a North Korean company called Korea Rungrado Trading Corporation, which was run by a committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea. The company was sanctioned by the US in 2016 and accused of funding the department that oversees the country's nuclear weapons program.

A global problem

The Walk Free Foundation said that one in 10 people lived under such conditions in North Korea, the highest concentration in the world.

Tens of thousands of workers worldwide send foreign currency back to Pyongyang, which is used to offset the economic impact of UN sanctions that were imposed over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The UN estimates that North Korea earns as much as \$2 billion a year from the workers it sends overseas.

Many North Koreans work in Polish shipyards, construction sites and farms, sending up to 90 percent of their salaries back to Pyongyang, according to the European Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea (EAHRNK).

HRWF Comment

See our statements on this issue at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Rights Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in 2018, 2017 and 2016:

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

- <https://www.osce.org/odihr/342706>
 - <https://www.osce.org/odihr/266761?download=true>
-

North Korea slams UN rapporteur over human rights comment

By Jung Da-min

The Korea Times (21.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2U7xHjO> - North Korea's party organ Rodong Sinmun on Monday criticized the U.N.'s Special Rapporteur of human rights Tomas Ojea Quintana's recent visit to South Korea, saying it triggered unnecessary conflict between the two Koreas.

"The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) has interrupted inter-Korean relations and has attempted to create an artificial disability in its progress," its editorial said.

"The fact that he said inter-Korean cooperation and North Korean human rights issues need to be settled at the same time is actually an anti-DPRK evil scheme that also ruins the cooperative atmosphere between the two Koreas," the paper added.

Tomas Ojea Quintana visited Seoul from Jan. 7-11 to meet South Korean government officials and diplomats as well as recent escapees from North Korea.

Wrapping up his five-day visit, Quintana told the media that North Korea's human rights situation remained "extremely serious."

But the North's party mouthpiece said Quintana was distorting the reality of the country to intensify sanctions against the regime in a wider evil scheme to destroy it.

Quintana has been saying that although the talks on North Korea's denuclearization are important, the human rights issue should not be overlooked while the Korean Peninsula seeks peace.

NK diplomat in Italy unaccounted for since leaving NK embassy in November

Yonhap (03.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2VqYFUV> - A senior North Korean diplomat stationed in Italy has disappeared with his wife since he left the North's embassy in early November last year, South Korea's spy agency said Thursday.

Jo Song-gil, the North's acting ambassador to Italy, left the North Korean Embassy in Rome days before his term ended in late November, the National Intelligence Service was quoted as saying by Rep. Kim Min-ki, a ruling party lawmaker.

Earlier in the day, the JoongAng Ilbo, a Seoul-based daily, said the 48-year-old envoy applied for personal security protection with the Italian government in early December as he is seeking asylum.

"The NIS has not attempted to contact Jo or not received any contact from him for the past two months," the spy agency was quoted as saying by Kim.

The agency also stopped short of confirming that Jo is attempting to gain asylum for a third country.

"We cannot confirm it," the NIS said in response to questions such as how many children the North Korean diplomat has or which country is protecting Jo and his wife, according to Kim.

sooyeon@yna.co.kr