

North Korean Defectors Give Grim Testimony of Experiences With China

Starving refugees forced back to North Korea, where they are tortured, imprisoned and increasingly executed

By GARY FEUERBERG
Epoch Times Staff

WASHINGTON—North Korea is known as one of the worst violators of human rights in the world. Seeking a better life, each year, countless individuals attempt to flee the North Korean regime under the leadership of Kim Jong Il. North Korean defector-women, who escape to China, typically, face a horrific life.

According to newspaper accounts and surveys, 90 percent of those who are able to elude Chinese border guards and police are sold and trafficked. And the refugees who are seized by Chinese authorities are forcibly returned to North Korea in violation of international law, where they face certain imprisonment, beatings, torture, and sometimes execution.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) held a hearing Sept. 23 to hear primarily North Korean defectors who eventually made it to the West and freedom.

The primary motivation of the defectors arises from hunger. Congressman Chris Smith (R-N.J.) said at this hearing that this summer's food shortages in North Korea were reportedly as bad as in the 1990s, when 1 million people starved to death.

"I thought that once I went to China my children would not starve to death, and that is why I crossed the Tumen River, but once we arrived on the other side, what awaited us were fear of capture by Chinese security officials and forced repatriation back to North Korea," said Ms. Mi Sun Bahng, in her written testimony.

"The first people I met as soon as I set foot in China were Chinese brokers. ... I was separated from my children and sold for 4,000 yuan, [approximately, US\$594]. What was most infuriating was that these Chinese [traffickers] called [us] North Korean defector-women 'pigs,' and treated us like animals."

She was sold again. Later some traffickers abducted her and sold her yet again. In a period of a few months, Ms. Bahng was "sold three times like livestock." She managed to escape but in the course of searching for her children, Chinese authorities apprehended her and forcibly repatriated her to North Korea.

In a prison in North Korea, Bahng described conditions of inmates, who dying of hunger, would try to catch insects to eat. "To this day I have unending nightmares of the people I saw there, those who would be working out in the fields and if they saw a snake or a frog would catch them and swallow them whole; there were people who would be defecating and if a piece of radish came out they would immediately wipe it on their sleeves and eat it; if there were pieces of beans or kernels of corn found in cow manure, the person who found them would consider that day to be their lucky day."

Su Jin Kang said that South Korea holds 20,000 North Korean defectors and that 78 percent are women. She is from Pyongyang, and escaped North Korea. She started an organization that helps North Korean women resettle and integrate



STOP REPATRIATION: Opponents of China's policy of repatriation of North Korean refugees describe the trafficking and abuse women face when they are sent back to North Korea. From L to R: Carl Gershman from National Endowment for Democracy, Su-jin Kang from Coalition for North Korean Women's Rights, translator, North Korean defector Mi Sun Bahng, North Korean defector Jin Hae Jo, and Steve Kim from 318 Partners on Sept. 23 at the Capitol Hill. GARY FEUERBERG/ EPOCH TIMES

into South Korean society.

The refugees were seeking work, she said, and "would never have imagined in their wildest dreams that they would be sold and traded in a human trafficking ring." The traffickers blackmail and threaten the women that they will report them to Chinese security authorities, and they will be forcibly repatriated.

Her organization, Coalition for North Korean Women's Rights, interviewed 100 North Korean defector-women living in South Korea, of which 90 percent had been sold in a human trafficking ring.

THE TRAFFICKING RACKET
Congressman Smith said, "It is the Chinese government's one-child policy that causes sex-selective abortion and gendercide that creates the market for trafficked women."

Because of China's one-child policy, a shortage of women in China has resulted, creating a demand for North Korean females, and human traffickers lure them into China.

Steve Kim, founder of 318 Partners Mission Foundation to rescue trafficked North Korean women in China, spent four years imprisoned in China for helping North Korean refugees flee from Chinese police.

In his testimony, Kim said that by 2030, nearly 30 million men in China of marriageable age will be without prospects of marrying. Because of China's severe gender imbalance, a market has been created of prostituting North Korean women and it is "growing alarmingly fast."

The traffickers in recent years have formed a system of trafficking that is immensely profitable Kim said. North Korean women follow a broker into China who bribes border guards. They are next sold in the inner provinces for three to five times their price at the border. Then they are sold again, usually to farmers or brothels, where they fetch 10 to 20 times their initial price.

CHINA'S VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW
"It is the Chinese government's ruthless policy of repatriating North Koreans that makes them so vulnerable to traffickers," Rep. Smith said. "In 2008, United States Commission on International



PROTESTING ABUSE: Hooded North Korean defectors, with their bodies chained together, participate in a rally in Seoul, South Korea, in December 2009, to protest the abuse of refugees from North Korea in China. JUNG YEON-JE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Religious Freedom reported that a group of 60 repatriated North Koreans were executed outright," said Rep. Smith.

China is a signatory of the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Knowing that these refugees if returned will be imprisoned, tortured, or executed, China is obligated to treat North Koreans escaping their homeland as asylum seekers.

Ms. Kang said that the Chinese authorities do not recognize North Korean refugees as refugees but rather as "illegal economic immigrants." Thus, China is saying this refugee problem is a matter between China and North Korea and not something that an international organizations needs to be involved with. She called on the United States and the international community to press China to uphold human rights and its treaty obligations.

Not only does the Chinese regime not recognize the North Korean defectors as refugees but it also won't allow the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to them. The solution to this refugee problem is much easier than finding homes for other refugees where no country wants to accept them. In this case, South Korea by law will take them in.

There was consensus at the hearing that China needs to change its treatment of North Koreans in

other ways. Children of North Korean refugee women and Chinese husbands must be allowed to go to school. What must also stop is China's policy of paying a bounty to Chinese citizens for reporting on refugees.

While the thrust of the hearing was in trying to make China change its "heartless" refugee policy, some time was devoted to changing North Korea too.

A decade ago, there were virtually no defectors and now there are 20,000, noted Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED has several programs designed to end the isolation of the people in North Korea, such as radio broadcasts. But none of these programs has much potential for effecting change of the steady growth of defectors residing in South Korea, according to Gershman.

The defectors have the ability to act as a "bridge population," said Gershman, linking what are "two profoundly different Korean societies" after six decades of "separation, enmity, and suspicion."

"As a population acculturated to the South but with roots in the North, the defector community is an invaluable resource that can facilitate the eventual integration of the now destitute and closed society of the North into a dynamic, open, and united Korean peninsula," Gershman said.

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Malaysia Advocates Moderation to Fight Extremism

By SYBILLE LEE
Epoch Times Staff

The prime minister of Malaysia is urging world leaders of all faiths to build a "Global Movement of the Moderates" to promote international peace and combat extremism.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly earlier this week Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that moderate religions should promote peace and pragmatism in order to marginalize extremists who have held the world hostage.

According to Bernama, Malaysia's News Service, he emphasized that the international community must urgently reclaim the moral

high ground. "We must choose negotiations over confrontation. We must choose to work together and not against each other," he said.

Out of concern over a perceived divide between Islam and the West, Prime Minister Najib noted that the real issue is not between Muslims and non-Muslims but between the moderates and extremists of all religions.

"Across all religions, we have inadvertently allowed the ugly voices of the periphery to drown out the many voices of reason and common sense," he said.

Prime Minister Najib complimented a group of American Evangelical Christians for preventing the threatened burning of the

Quran by arguing that such an act was un-Christian.

He attributed the final outcome of the incident as an example of what can be achieved "when moderates in each faith stand up to the extremists who are trying to hijack the universal values of our religions."

The prime minister also pointed out the benefits of supporting the Cordoba House, which would include a mosque and a multi-faith community center, to be located near the site of the World Trade Center.

"We must support the objectives of the Cordoba initiatives, an organization that focuses on promoting peace, understanding and moderation, both between Muslims and

non-Muslims and within the Muslim communities," he said while commending President Barack Obama and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg for affirming the rights of supporters of the Cordoba House.

Prime Minister Najib described the way of living among the multiple races in Malaysia as in equilibrium, or "wasatiyyah," in the Islamic tradition of mutual peace.

He also took the chance to introduce the current political program of "iMalaysia" which was designed and implemented under his administration. He explained the philosophy as "a vision that seeks renewal and rejuvenation to bring all people together in a just and harmonious relationship."