

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing

on

North Korean Human Rights Movement:
Current Prospects and Obstacles

April 28, 2026 - 12:30 p.m.

2118 Rayburn House Office Building

Statement of Kim Ji Young

Truth, Information, and Freedom in North Korea
Free North Korea Radio

Dear Members of Congress, I was born in North Korea and lived there for 31 years before entering the Republic of Korea in 2013. I now work at Free North Korea Radio, where I currently serve as its President.

There is only one reason I stand before you today: to make known the reality of those who, even at this very moment, continue to live inside North Korea longing for outside information, and to explain why the work of bringing them the truth must continue.

I was thirteen years old when I first secretly listened to an outside radio broadcast. In North Korea, listening to foreign broadcasts is not simply an illegal act. It is a dangerous choice that puts not only one's own safety at risk, but the fate of one's entire family as well. If discovered, the punishment does not end with the individual; it can extend to the whole family.

And yet I listened. The reason was clear. It was because there was truth in those broadcasts—truth that could never be heard in North Korea. There were stories of a world in which human beings could live with dignity, a society in which people could speak freely, the possibility that one could change one's future through effort, and the idea that human dignity is worthy of respect. To me, that small voice coming through the radio was not merely information. It was the first window through which I encountered freedom and hope.

From that day on, my life changed. Information awakened me. It made me ask questions. And in the end, it led me toward freedom. I can say clearly before you

today: one of the most powerful forces that can change North Korea is not military force, but information. Information changes people, and changed people ultimately change society. I myself am living proof of that.

While living in North Korea, I also experienced another reality firsthand. Because I was born into a relatively better-off family, I was able to receive aid supplies sent by South Korea and the international community. But those goods were originally intended for ordinary North Korean residents, for orphans, and for those truly in desperate need. The reality was different. The hungry elite and officials took them first, and those who needed them most often did not receive them properly.

That experience left me with an important question: Is the current method of assistance really helping the people of North Korea? For a long time, I was deeply skeptical of humanitarian aid itself. But my thinking has changed somewhat. The problem is not aid in itself. The problem is to whom and how that aid is delivered. Aid that does not directly reach the North Korean people can ultimately be used to sustain and strengthen the regime. The international community must therefore seriously reconsider new methods and structures of delivery that can actually reach the people of North Korea.

After my defection, I began in 2016 to work with Free North Korea Radio in delivering outside information into North Korea. Last year, our founder, President Kim Seong Min, passed away after a long battle with cancer. He was a man who devoted his life to bringing truth to the people of North Korea. I have continued this work after him. For me, this is not merely a job. It is a calling.

The reason is simple: we know what the North Korean regime fears most. It is not guns. It is not sanctions. It is outside information. More than anything else, the regime fears the truth of the outside world reaching its people. That is why it has created laws to block outside culture and information, and why it punishes young people especially harshly. But many young North Koreans already know. They are beginning to realize that the world is not what they were taught it was, and that what the regime has told them is not the whole truth.

According to recent testimony from North Korean defectors, those whom the regime fears most are people who have changed through exposure to outside information, and defectors who speak the truth before the international community. What they fear is the exposure of lies and the revelation of the true nature of the system.

Another change we must pay attention to is the awakening of conscience inside North Korea itself. Testimony that some people have come to know about God through outside information, and that there are even those who pray together while imprisoned, is profoundly important. It shows that inside North Korean society, what is growing is not merely access to information, but also human dignity, conscience, and the power to think for oneself. It means that inner change has begun within a society long maintained by control and fear. And that change, too, begins with outside information.

For that reason, I view the recent suspension of North Korea-directed radio broadcasting by the South Korean government as a very serious matter. There may be explanations offered—financial constraints, tension reduction, or a choice made in the name of peace. But I consider this decision extremely dangerous. It is not merely a policy adjustment. It is the deliberate closing of one of the very few channels through which the people of North Korea can access the truth.

The North Korean regime is not one that changes easily through dialogue. It has long maintained a structure in which it sends conciliatory messages only when necessary and can reverse them at any time. While outwardly speaking of dialogue and de-escalation, it has in reality continued to strengthen internal control and information blockades. Therefore, the approach that says, “If we do not provoke North Korea, peace can be maintained,” does not reflect reality. Silence and concession only create more room for a dictatorship, and in that process, it is the people of North Korea who pay the highest price.

I believe especially that policies aimed at blocking the inflow of outside information are directly tied to the future of 23 million North Koreans. North Koreans live their entire lives under distorted information. They are repeatedly taught that America is an aggressor and that the outside world is the enemy. The most powerful tool for breaking these lies is outside information. One radio, one small storage device, one short story about the outside world can change a person’s life. I am one of those changed people.

Distinguished Members, today, I respectfully ask the international community and the United States Congress for three things.

First, please support and strengthen every means of delivering outside information to the people of North Korea. Radio broadcasting, digital storage media, and all forms of information inflow into North Korea must be preserved and expanded so that North Koreans can gain access to the truth.

Second, humanitarian aid must be redesigned so that it can directly reach the people of North Korea. Assistance that does not reach the people may ultimately help the regime instead. We must look not only at the scale of aid, but even more importantly at the structure and effectiveness of its delivery.

Third, a more sober and realistic approach is needed toward the strategic deception of the North Korean regime. We must not lose sight of the essential nature of the problem because of temporary conciliatory messages. True peace is not built on silence. Lasting peace is possible only on the foundation of truth, freedom, and the people's right to know.

What I share with you today is not merely a personal story. At this very moment, somewhere inside North Korea, someone is risking his or her life to listen to an outside broadcast. That person is someone like I once was. To them, outside information is not a luxury. It is survival. It is hope. It is the future.

If we cut off that signal, we cut off their hope as well. Please listen to the voices of the people of North Korea. And please do not close the path by which they can reach the truth and move toward freedom. Thank you.

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