

## The Statement of Lim Il

### My Life as a North Korean Overseas Worker in Kuwait

Lim Il, Former North Korean Overseas Worker in Kuwait

I was born in October 1968 in Pyongyang, North Korea. After graduating from high school, I worked in Social Safety Agency and Foreign Construction Complex for 12 years in North Korea. In early September 1996 in Pyongyang, I was selected to be an overseas worker. After being selected, I was trained by the Workers' Party, which is the sole governing party of North Korea. The North Korean authorities taught me how to propagate Kim Jong Il and the North Korean system in other countries.

In Kuwait, I belonged to Liberation Construction Company of North Korea, which was organized by Pyongyang Foreign Construction Complex. There were about 600 North Korean workers like me. At that time, there were 3 companies of North Korea like mine in Kuwait.

One was a construction company which was established by the General Bureau of Capital Construction of North Korea with 700 North Korean workers dispatched. The other one was a construction company which was established by the General Bureau of Neungra Construction of North Korea with 500 North Korean workers dispatched.

The North Korean dormitory where I was stayed in Kuwait was a closed school which was bombed in the Gulf War in 1991. The class rooms were used as rooms for sleep, and the gym was used for a cafeteria and a meeting room. The portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were hung in every class room. The slogan of the Workers' Party of North Korea was hung in the meeting room.

On November 8, 1996, the day after I arrived in Kuwait, I woke up at 5A.M. and ate breakfast at 6A.M. The North Korean authorities in Kuwait provided 200g of bread, a cup of coffee, butter and an egg as a breakfast. Compared to breakfast in Pyongyang, it was fairly good.

In the morning, I worked from 7A.M. to 12P.M. I worked in a housing construction site in a huge, empty desert. Based on the architectural drawing, I assembled timberwork for throwing cement. I was a carpentry worker.

The lunch time was from 12P.M. to 1P.M. The North Korean authorities provided rice, beef soup and kimchi as lunch. Because of the weather in Kuwait, the local workers had 3 hours of lunch time while North Korean workers had one hour of lunch time.

After lunch, I started to work again from 1P.M. Around 4P.M. the workers from other countries received snacks (bread, milk, and coke) from the Kuwait company, but the North Korean workers did not receive any. The workers from other countries asked us why we do not receive any snack. Then some of the North Korean workers answered, "We, North Korean

workers, do not like snacks. Instead, we are trained by the North Korean authorities about revolution." However, the North Korean workers were not happy saying that.

The work finished at 7P.M., and from then the workers ate dinner by 8P.M. Every North Korean worker wanted to eat dinner and sleep, but the reality was not like that. The dinner menu was always same as lunch menu. Sometimes, the North Korean authorities provided noodle as dinner to save money.

You would not believe it but in North Korea, only high officials of the Workers' Party can eat bread, egg, beef soup, and noodle for every meal. General citizens in North Korea cannot even imagine to eat them. So, the North Korean authorities in Kuwait emphasized that what we, the North Korean workers dispatched to Kuwait, eat is sumptuous food so we have to appreciate it. Since the authorities said so, we had to appreciate the small amount of meal.

From 8P.M. the North Korean workers and I were allowed to take shower and have cultural life. In the dormitory, there was a shower facility, but the water was provided only for an hour. The North Korean authorities did so to save money.

After taking shower, the North Korean workers and I had to be trained by the North Korean authorities. Even in Kuwait, the North Korean workers and I had to have evaluation time every Saturday, take education on the Supreme Leader every Wednesday, and take a lecture on policies of the Workers' Party every Friday. In the meeting room, every North Korean worker had to watch the documentary on Kim Jong Il. On Kim Jong Il's birthday on February 16, every North Korean worker had to confirm and show our loyalty to Kim Jong Il.

At 10P.M., I was allowed to sleep. However, every one day in three days, I had to do the night work. The North Korean officials at the work site forced me to do the night work by saying, "Let's finish the construction as soon as possible so that we can give joy to our Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il." No North Korean workers can say "No" to this. If one does so, he or she is considered as a reactionary and is repatriated to North Korea.

Every North Korean worker should obey what the North Korean officials said, so we did the night work from 9P.M. to 12A.M. Even though we over worked, the North Korean officials did not pay us for it. Therefore, we worked almost 11 hours a day, and including the night work, we worked 14 hours a day.

We only had a holiday on Friday of the second week and the fourth week of a month. During holiday, we did laundry, slept, played card game, and talked about our hometown in North Korea. However, we never talked about politics such as the North Korean government, Supreme Leader, etc.

Based on the rule of North Korea, the North Korean overseas workers are not allowed to go outside of the work site of the dormitory. Particularly, an individual action is not allowed. The North Korean officials brainwashed us by saying, "The South Korean agents can kidnap you at any time if you go out of the dormitory so you should stay only in the dormitory."

If someone has to go outside, he or she has to go with more than 2 other people and tell what they did outside to the North Korea officials. This is the rule for all North Korean overseas workers. Also, the North Korean overseas workers have to watch each other. I also did.

However, the North Korean authorities did not pay me at all while I was working in Kuwait. When I asked about my salary, the North Korean officials said that the contracted company in Kuwait is having an economic difficulty so they cannot pay me. The second time I asked about my salary, the North Korean officials said that the Workers' Party of North Korea did not command them to pay us. For it, no one could raise questions any more. In North Korea, the Workers' Party means the Supreme Leader, so no one can raise any complaint against it.

At the work site in Kuwait, I met another North Korean worker who worked there for one year, and he told me that he and other North Korean workers did not get paid for a year. After hearing about that, I was in despair. I realized that I was dispatched to Kuwait not to earn money but just to eat and work. Even though I worked very hard, I was not compensated at all.

I thought many times but did not get any solution for it. It was a pain to be brainwashed about Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's ideologies even in Kuwait. We had to be evaluated for our ideologies every week and watch each other even in Kuwait. So I realized that there is no hope in North Korea, my home country.

In March 1997, I went to the South Korean Embassy in Kuwait to go to South Korea. At the Embassy, I said, "I hate North Korea, where I lived for my entire life. Even though I was dispatched to Kuwait, I was continuously brainwashed by the North Korean authorities on Kim Jong Il's ideologies and was forced to watch my fellow North Korean workers. Also, I was not paid at all. I want to live in South Korea. I don't know well about South Korea but I'm sure it would not like North Korea."

I legally entered Kuwait so I went to UNHCR in Kuwait to be accepted as a refugee. I stayed in the South Korean Embassy for five days, and while I was staying here, I came to know that the company in Kuwait which made a contract with North Korea regularly gave salaries for the North Korean workers (\$550 per one North Korean worker) to the North Korean company. Therefore, my salaries, which I never received, went to the North Korean authorities, which is No.39 Office of the Workers' Party which manages foreign currency.

In North Korea, the Leader Kim Jong Un needs a huge amount of money to maintain his regime. First, it costs 200 million dollars a year to manage the Palace where the corps of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are preserved. The regime will keep maintaining the Palace because it can effectively control people in North Korea by idolizing the dead supreme leaders.

Furthermore, Kim Jong Un should constantly offer presents such as luxurious cars, apartments and household appliances to the officials of the Workers' Party in order to make them be loyal to him. To buy such luxurious presents to maintain his regime, Kim Jong Un needs huge amount of foreign currency.

Another reason why Kim Jong Un needs foreign currency is to maintain his own luxurious life. He has more than 20 luxurious villas in North Korea, and it costs 300 million dollars to maintain those villas. Last year, he spent 640 million dollars to buy his own luxurious items and fine cuisine.

Enormous amount of money has been spent for Kim Jong Un's own pleasure. Therefore, the North Korean overseas laborers like me should earn foreign currency because their leader

said so, and the money that they earn constantly goes to the regime.

In North Korea, it is strictly forbidden to talk about Kim Jong Un's private life.

Nobody tries to know about it. If someone does, he or she would be considered as a reactionary and severely punished. The regime actually removes such person from the society. If someone is just suspected to criticize Kim Jong Un, he or she would suddenly disappear someday. This is very common in North Korea.

North Korea exists only for Kim Jong Un, the dictator. Half of the people in North Korea barely survive by eating grass soup, but the regime always blames USA and South Korea for their poverty. I don't know whether the supreme leader, Kim Jong Un, knows the reality of the people or not, but what I know is that he doesn't care about it at all.

There are still 20,000 workers in Kuwait, where I used to work. The work site where I used to work is another North Korea in Kuwait. I was forced to do slave labor there with many other North Korean workers dispatched. We had to work for more than 14 hours a day without receiving any salary.

To be honest with you, my co-workers in Kuwait still appear in my dream and say to me, "Did you go to Seoul only for your survival? Please expose our miserable lives to the world." They don't know about the universal rights for human being but they are the same human beings like us. I sincerely ask you to have a deep concern in the North Korean overseas workers who are still doing the forced slave labors.

Thank you.