

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
Hearing  
on  
South Korean Refugee Policy and the New Administration  
June 24, 2022- 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. EDT  
Virtual, via Cisco WebEx  
**Statement of Suzanne Scholte**  
**Seoul Peace Prize Laureate**  
**Chair, North Korea Freedom Coalition**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about North Korean escapees and how they have been treated by the Moon administration. I want to state emphatically that there are hundreds of North Korean refugees in grave peril right now in detention in China, so I am sincerely thankful for your attention to their plight. I fervently hope that the People's Republic of China will act in accordance with its international treaty obligations and that the Republic of Korea will act in accordance with its constitution to expeditiously resettle these refugees, who are citizens of South Korea under their constitution. We know for a fact that a family of four arrived safely in South Korea directly from China because of cooperation between these two nations -- and a lot of prayer.



The Kim family has sent this photo for this hearing and agreed to allow me to submit their testimony written by Mrs. Kim which I have included at the end of this document.

There is no reason why ALL those seeking resettlement in South Korea and other nations should not be safely resettled tomorrow! While I am very grateful to the outgoing Moon administration for rescuing these four, I want to appeal to the Yoon administration to save the rest. Send a plane or two, like the Korean government did when 486 were rescued out of southeast Asia in the summer of 2004.

When I say tomorrow, I am serious: the North Korean refugee crisis can be solved overnight if China simply upheld its treaty obligations and the Republic of Korea returned to their policy of welcoming them. According to Unification Hope Mission, there are approximately 1200 North Koreans detained in Chinese prisons and at least half or approximately 600, are children, women and men who were specifically trying to get to South Korea. That desire alone is grounds for execution if they are repatriated by China to North Korea. Based on the testimonies of hundreds of eyewitnesses we know that North Koreans who are repatriated face certain torture, certain detention, and execution because it is a crime – punishable by death – for leaving the country without permission.

Now, today these refugees are in even greater danger than ever before because the refugees that escaped during the COVID pandemic had to have the financial resources to do that which means they were either Korean Worker's Party members or had family in South Korea that sent them financial support. These are "crimes" punishable by death in the DPRK.

China knows this: Xi Jinping knows what North Koreans face when they are forcefully repatriated but continues to label them "economic migrants."

I was very blessed to have recently spoken to that family of four who made it to South Korea and they told me that while the family was separated – the father and son in a regular Chinese prison, the mother and daughter and younger son in a facility for North Korean refugees -- they were treated well by the Chinese prison guards. They made sure they had what they needed. So, I want to recognize the compassion and kindness shown by the Chinese for these helpless refugees, as it is the regime of Xi Jinping that is responsible for this cruel and illegal repatriation policy, not the Chinese people, some of whom have risked their own well-being and been jailed for helping refugees as Chinese citizens have been part of the underground railroad for decades.

Now, we are at a most opportune time in the history of this crisis because of two historic factors. First is that North Korea was one of the first countries to close its border in response to COVID – and that border remains closed today. Thus, they have refused to accept any refugees back from China which means there have been no forceful repatriations. A dramatic illustration of the DPRK's fears and their cruelty and their total disregard for human life was their treatment of a South Korean maritime official who approached their sea border in September 2020. He was murdered by North Korean border guards. They shot him and then burned his body.

Second, historically the Chinese have been willing to quietly allow safe passage to North Koreans and in some cases large numbers to show their disapproval with the DPRK's ongoing missile launches and nuclear threats. Right now, it appears the DPRK is on nonstop missile launch and nuclear test mode causing instability in the region.

So, this is a most opportune time for South Korea to appeal to China based on humanitarian concerns to allow these refugees safe passage and thus, they know longer need to be a burden on Chinese detention centers and prisons. Furthermore, there is plenty of room at Hanawon, the South Korean resettlement facility, because when Kim Jong Un came to power in December 2011, he initiated a severe crackdown that has never let up to try to stop North Koreans from escaping. The number escaping dropped in half, and then with the COVID lock down initiated in February 2020, the number of refugees dropped from 1,047 in 2019 to only 63 in 2021 according to the ROK Ministry of Unification.

But, how has the policy of outgoing President Moon Jae Un impacted North Korea Refugees?

Now, in my own personal experience I must tell you that the career South Korean officials I have dealt with have been terrific. They have done everything they could to respond to me anytime I had information on refugees needing help – every time. We have agonized together over those lost and rejoiced together over those saved. But for those in positions of authority appointed by Moon that was not the case. Moon was clearly more interested in pleasing the Kim dictatorship, and I feel a large part of this is because the defectors were having the most significant impact of any government entity or NGO on reaching the people of North Korea with the truth. I contend the North Koreans in South Korea were winning the information campaign by getting information to North Korea by every means possible by land, by sea and by air. They dedicated themselves to freeing the people of North Korea with the power of truth and their mantra became the *Truth will set them free* and peaceful change in North Korea from dictatorship to democracy can be accomplished without weapons but with words.

In response, Moon launched an aggressive campaign at the direct orders of Kim Jong Un and Kim Yo Jong to cut off all these successful works of the North Korean led NGOs that during the Park administration were partners with the South Korean entities who cared about the suffering in North Korea. Stopping the North Korean escapees was part of this because it is the escapees and their bravery of sharing their testimonies that led all the world to know the truth of the crimes against humanity of the Kim regime.

Now, the Republic of Korea should be highly praised for their successful efforts in safely resettling over 33,826 refugees as of this week! This is a huge challenge as most North Koreans arrive in South Korea with PTSD. Women, who will tell you they had the value of a “fly” in North Korea, have often been subjected to human trafficking and the children arrive with little to no education. But given the proper assistance they can thrive and lead productive and meaningful lives. I met a young North Korean in November 2018 who defected because he was listening to foreign radio broadcasts and heard that then-President Park Guen Hye told North Koreans that they were welcome to come to South Korea so they could follow their dreams. And so he did and so did many others. President Park’s words: "South Korea will always leave the path open, so the people of North Korea can find hope and life. The people of North Korea can always come to South Korea, where freedom prospers."

But, when Moon Jae-In became president of South Korea, all of that changed. As mentioned, in previous testimony today his administration repatriated North Korean refugees in violation of

both the Republic of Korea's constitution and South Korea's international treaty obligations. He pulled out the welcome mat, and slammed the door in their faces and mine, too. In a not so famous incident at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Washington, D.C. on April 30, 2021, I initially had the door slammed in my face when I was hand delivering a letter signed by 23 former U.S. government officials representing every U.S. president since Richard Nixon including both previous Special Envoys for North Korea Human Rights, Robert King who served for President Obama and Jay Lefkowitz who served for President Bush. With that letter we delivered the photos of two families including the family of 4 who were eventually rescued telling the South Korean officials these people will be killed if you do not act.

In addition, to having a hostile policy towards North Korean escapees, in a shocking betrayal, the Moon administration revoked the passport of a South Korean businessmen who was helping North Koreans. By any other human rights standard, this man was a hero but because he was arrested by the Chinese and put in prison for helping North Korean refugees, the Moon Administration invalidated his passport claiming he "damaged the national prestige by conducting illegal acts in a foreign country." He was saving people's lives!

My recommendation to the Yoon administration is to send a plane to China and bring those North Koreans to South Korea to help those Korean children, women and men follow their dreams. It is the North Koreans living in freedom in South Korea that gave President Yoon his margin of victory in the last election because it was a matter of freedom and life in South Korea or repatriation and death for them in North Korea.

I conclude with a two-word quote from this newly resettled North Korean family, I asked them: "Why did you leave North Korea for South Korea? And Mrs. Kim quickly replied, 'FOR FREEDOM'."

### References

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**Testimony of Mrs. Kim for the TLHRC –  
Please understand that for the safety of other family members some information has not  
been shared**

Hello. My name is Kim XXX, who defected from North Korea in 2020.

I used to live in XXXXX, XXXX Province, North Korea, and on xx xx, 2020, I tried to escape and succeeded. When we first defected, 17 people tried to escape from North Korea, but only 7 people, made it to China, and all 10 were captured by North Korean soldiers. At that time, in such a dangerous situation, our two sons were the youngest among them, but, somehow our family safely crossed to China without being caught.

Until the moment my family finally decided to defect from North Korea, we had never considered any idea or goal of defecting to South Korea. In North Korea, I worked at the XXX (a prestigious place). Because of my occupation, despite my husband has always wanted to defect to South Korea after conferring with his older sister, he waited to share the plan with me until two hours before we left our home. He was worried that if he had shared his plan with me earlier because I work at the XXX, my colleagues might have found out, disrupting his plan. I halfheartedly agreed with his plan because our kids and relatives were eager to defect, so I had to pluck up the courage, telling myself, “Well then, okay, let’s go see what South Korea is like.”

It was through no one's virtue or guidance that our family was able to come to China even in that dreadful situation, but only because God the Father has guided our family from that time on. After arriving in China, we were taken to a house in XXX, China. As we entered the house, I noticed a verse from the Book of John on the wall that I saw in the Bible. The hosts sat us in the room and started to pray for us in Korean. They also prayed before each meal. We were confused because we were new to saying grace before meals. From then, we spent our days learning the Bible and singing hymns with our Korean hosts.

From that time on, while studying the Bible, every single word of the gospel in the Bible touched my heart, and I especially came to believe in God. When I was told by our Korean hosts that we were eating, having a shelter, and spending the money from the sincere donations of the members of Unification Hope Mission. I was very shocked there, thinking myself how awesome God is that the South Koreans follow and praise Him, giving their money to those who need help. It seems that my faith in God began to sprout in my heart as a result of that shock.

So, as we continued to study the Bible in XXX, we tried to cross the Vietnamese border. However, the COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan, China. So, we had to wait, and the waiting time extended from one month to two months and eventually to seven months. After seven months had passed, my other relatives departed for Korea with the first group and safely crossed the border into Laos. In Laos, they successfully made it to the Korean Embassy and arrived in South Korea. My family left a month later and tried to cross the border, but due to the COVID-19, we stayed in XXX, China, which is a region to the border. My family and I thought we might be caught by the Chinese police on our way to XXX, but we continued to pray to God that we could cross the border safely. There were many Chinese police officers on our way, but we thought that God was guiding and protecting us, so we were not

afraid at all, and we reached XXX Province. However, the situation at the border was so bad that we had to stay there. There, we were in a dangerous situation because we had to hide, but through the support and continuous prayers from Unification Hope Mission, God comforted us and helped us deepen our faith in Him, carving the gospel in our hearts. As we were spending day after day in XXX, because it was very dangerous to cross the border to go to South Korea, I told my children, "It would be great if we could just take a plane to South Korea instead of crossing the border." My children told me I was daydreaming.

But for some reason, I kept thinking that God would send us onto a safe and easy plane ride. On XXX, 2021, as we were spending another long day in XXX, praying to God to save our family, the Chinese police came and took our family. It was the first time in my life that I had shackles on my hands, and I didn't feel the fear that people with shackles would have. We went to the police station without any fear. On our way to the police station and even when we were being interrogated, shackled, and sent to an airport to be put on a plane, we were fixated on the only thought that, "God will soon send us to South Korea after a while in prison, not making us cross the border." At the time, my eldest son was 19 years old. When he saw his mom and dad shackled and being escorted into the airport, he said with tears in his eyes that he would never forget the moment.

So we got on a plane and were transported to the XXX Police Station, where my youngest son and I were separated from my oldest son and husband, and our two groups were separated and locked in different prisons. In prison, each day, at first, I was afraid that I would be sent back to North Korea, so I couldn't eat properly for about a month. My youngest son lost 8 kg because his body didn't really take in Chinese food well. About a month later, from that point on, I was like, "No, I'm not alone. God will protect our family. God the Father will surely take us to South Korea by plane. I'm going to get my strength and keep making my wish to God from now on." Thinking about it, I sang a hymn that was fading in my memory and cried in my bed for fear that the police would see it, saying, "Father, God, this daughter is praying. God made heaven and earth, and God, who was crucified and resurrected, please save our family."

Because my youngest son and I only remembered the Lord's Prayer from studying the Bible in China, we sat down and continued to pray on the Lord's Prayer every time, whether we were up or in our bed, and that's how we spent our days in prison. One day, after the seven months had passed, God appeared in my dream and said that my family could go to South Korea and comfort me.

I was so curious that I thought how great it would be if that dream became a reality, but after three days, the Chinese police unexpectedly came and told me that my family was going to South Korea. At that time, I thought, "It was not in vain that our family prayed and prayed with so much supplication in such a difficult and dangerous situation. God the Father was always answering our prayers. Again, we prayed a prayer of thanks to God. We came to develop our faith in God further, believing in His word despite how dangerous and difficult a situation we are in. We started to follow what God said in the form of the truth and believe in the word of Jesus."

As it is written in John 5:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life.” Amen!

As it is written in the Bible, our family received the eternal life without being sent back to North Korea, enjoying a new life, because we trusted in God and prayed until the end in the midst of danger.

God the Father is really watching over our family and He was thinking about how to send my family to South Korea safely, and He put us on a plane bound for South Korea as we wished.

On XXX 2021, God finally took our family to the South Korean embassy in XXX and put us on a plane bound for South Korea. On that day, God eventually did something to our family that no president or parent could understand or no extraordinary people could do for us. After safely staying in the XXX prison for seven months, we were sent to the South Korean embassy in XXX. Finally, on XXX, 2021, my family arrived at the Incheon International airport. All my dreams finally came true.

People! God is always listening to your prayers. God always answers your prayers. No one can stand up against God, who can forgive our sin and rescue us from troubles. When we arrived in South Korea, where we wanted to settle, we were being investigated by the National Intelligence Service and received education for settling in South Korea at Hanawon. We had a lot of trouble deciding where to live in South Korea. But, we started to lean towards XXX. Since we were in prison, in China, for my family, the pastor and members of the XXX Church have been praying earnestly for us. In particular, the Pastor of XXX Church felt like my mother in North Korea and continued to show his love to our family. We chose XXX to live in. Our family is truly blessed. This is a family that has been blessed with so many blessings by God's grace. I would like to share my prayer with you.

“Father, I sincerely hope that our family that you saved would have prosperous days from now on. Father, so many of my people in North Korea are still crying for unification, longing for salvation. Father! Not many people in North Korea already know that so many South Koreans want unification, so the gospel can spread in North Korea. Father! Please provide the people of North Korea with the gospel who dwell in the darkness, so the two Koreas can reunify, becoming a great, prosperous nation with the harmonious people in Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!”