

**Testimony of Paek Kwang-II for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**  
**“North Korea: Ongoing Human Rights Violations in an Era of Change”**  
**September 19, 2012**

“The reality of North Korean human rights situation that I personally experienced.”

I was born in Hamheung City in South Hamkyung Province, North Korea. I lived in North Korea for 24 years since my birth as the only son out of 3 children in the family, and my parents were teachers. Because I was the only son to my father who was a teacher, he wished me to be a teacher as well. Thus, after I graduated from my high school in my hometown in Hamheung City, I studied at Kim Hyung Jik University of Education from 1990 to 1995. In 1995, after I graduated from the university, I came back to my hometown and worked as a high school teacher at my old school in Hamheung.

The incident that made me flee North Korea happened when I was working as a high school teacher in Hamheung City after my graduation in Pyongyang. It was September in 1998. By chance, I obtained a videotape of a South Korean-produced TV drama called "Hourglass (Morae Shigae)". I watched it with several friends of mine. At that time, I watched it very seriously. It was because the TV drama "Hourglass" reflected the reality of South Korea of the 1980's. Perhaps, watching the TV drama was the very first opportunity to experience what South Korean society was like.

After watching the drama, friends of mine who watched it with me begged me to lend the video tape to them. After sincerely requesting them to be very careful, I gave them the video. However, I never imagined that the incident could completely change my destiny, and my life, as someone who was born and raised in North Korea. Friends of mine who borrowed the South Korean TV drama from me started to make duplicates of it. As a result, while I was not aware of it, the South Korean TV drama started to spread in town, and within 25 days, it was discovered by the State Political Security Department.

It was the last week of September in 1998. At that time, it was as serious as to be directly reported to Kim Jung Il. It was due to the fact that although there were rumors that South Korean movies were spreading in North Korea, my case was the first incident that was caught by the State Political Security Department (SPSD). At that time, Kim Jong Il who received the report gave an order "To completely destroy the rotten capitalism of the Yellow Culture that is spreading all over the Democratic People's Republic of Korea." Since then, the North Korean government has been controlling the inflow of the culture from South Korea, America, Britain, and Japan that are the enemies of North Korea, under the mission to wipe out the capitalism of yellow culture.

Back then, the department of counterintelligence of the SPSP in South Hamkyung Province defined the first person who distributed the video of South Korean TV drama in the area as a spy and tried to arrest me. The department of counterintelligence in the SPSP is responsible for searching for spies. The people who watched the South Korean drama "Hourglass" were arrested one by one and went through brutal torture. Luckily, some of my father's formal students worked for the SPSP and notified him about it. Thus, I was able to escape to China and avoided getting arrested.

It was October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, when I fled to China. Even though I succeeded in fleeing North Korea, within 15 days, I was arrested by the Chinese security police in Yanbian, in the Korean Autonomous region. It was because I did not know my way around China at all. After I was arrested by the Chinese security police, I was repatriated to North Korea. After the repatriation, I underwent 60 days of unbearable torture and investigation that literally killed me, by the SPSD in Hamkyung Province that controls the entire area of Tumen River region.

At that time, the SPSD accused me of being guilty of three things. The first one was the circulation of culture of capitalism. It was because I spread the enemy South Korean TV drama into North Korean society. The second is that I harmed its superior socialism, meaning that I caused damage to the superior socialism that was created by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jung Il. The third is that I illegally crossed over into China; instead of facing the law I escaped to China.

One who receives such charges must receive the death penalty. It was not an ordinary crime but a political crime, which meant that it was a political offense. I suddenly became a political criminal and had to experience 60 days of brutal torture by the SPSD in the underground interrogation room in North Hamkyung Province. I went through what is called the pigeon torture. I was hung while my wrists and ankles were twisted and tied in the ceiling of the underground interrogation room. Then I had to go through the 'water ghost' torture. My head was plunged into water for 3 minutes each time. They hit all over my body with a piece of thick lumber. They kicked all over body with their military boots on. I also went through many other forms of torture. If I was about to die due to the torture, they put me in solitary confinement and left me there, which meant that I was to die there.

If anyone is arrested by SPSD, he or she has to give up being a human being. The officers of the SPSD are allowed to kill people by torturing them in the interrogation room. And they are not responsible for the death of anyone in the interrogation room.

Even today, the unbearably painful torture that I experienced is practiced on so many North Koreans in the interrogation room. Back then I also was a victim. The 60 days that I underwent in the underground interrogation room of the SPSD was just total hell that I don't even want to remember at all.

For seven days, I was tortured in the interrogation room of SPSD. If I was conscious and opened my eyes, I was tortured again. If I screamed due to the pain, they tortured me more just because I screamed. If I begged for forgiveness, they tortured me more just because I begged. If I cried due to the pain, they tortured me more just because I cried. The interrogation officers who tortured me were not human beings. For them I was just another person to be tortured. They didn't have souls that ordinary people had. In my eye, they seemed to be beasts since they didn't possess human being's souls.

After the 7 days of torture, finally the investigation started. However, the process of the investigation was a continuation of the torture that I had received prior to it. For them, why would they need the investigation? To this day, I think about this. The investigation was a mere formality. The goal of the officers in the SPSD was to torture someone and thus get a false confession that he or she had made contact with South Korean intelligence personnel and received assignments from them. They had to turn someone like us into a spy. In order

to accomplish their goals, they could do anything. However, I could not agree to what they asked me to do. As a result, I had to face even more harsh and intense torture.

During the 60 days of torture, my body was totally wrecked. My soul also was destroyed. There were only skin and bones left. I could not even stand by myself. When about 40 days of torture passed, I was hallucinating. I could feel that there was death waiting for me just around the corner. Due to malnutrition and severe excruciation, my anus became distended and I was getting extremely weaker. However, they paid no attention to me whatsoever. I was becoming a living corpse.

But then on December 24th of 1998, I was transferred from the North Hamkyung Province of the SPSD to the South Hamkyung Province of the SPSD. I didn't know why I was transferred. After walking through the coldness of the North with my weak body, I was escorted by the officers of the SDSD and got on the train. They did not escort a human being but a corpse. In the moving train, I briefly fell into thought. Soon after, I determined to commit suicide. I probably thought about more torture that I had to face in the new interrogation room of the SPSD in South Hamkyung Province that I was being transferred to. Even thinking of torture caused fear in me.

I decided to kill myself by jumping off of the moving train. Then I waited for a chance to jump, and I had a chance. I jumped off of the running train with all my strength, but I didn't die. Thus, I wanted to flee to China one last time. However, it was a mere foolish attempt because I was physically and mentally destroyed and incapable of doing so. Despite my situation, I continued to move. I crawled and crawled. During the day, I hid myself in the mountains. At night, I came out of the mountains and crawled.

Finally on January 8th of 1999, I finally crossed the Tumen River and fled to China. For me it was a miracle. However, as soon as I reached a road near the border, due to the effect of torture, I collapsed. I thought I died, but I didn't. For exactly 60 days, I was in a vegetative state. I was in coma for 60 days. It has to be a miracle that I survived and regained consciousness. The incident where I collapsed on the road in China turned out to be another opportunity that changed my life once again.

The person who discovered me lying on the cold road was a Korean-American missionary. He brought me to his place and provided intensive care. And he sincerely prayed to God to bring me back to life. He prayed to God to "save this poor soul" then to "devote my soul for God." God listened to his prayers. The Almighty God gave my life back. He gave me a new life and a new soul. If it were not for God's sovereignty, I would have died on the road in China.

After sixty days, I completely recovered. Moreover, the missionary's prayer became a reality because I became a minister. I received a prayer of blessing by the missionary in China. After that I prayed to God that I was going to devote my life to Him, who saved my life. I lived in China for 2 years. Then I entered South Korea with God's blessings March, 2001. After that, I obtained my graduate degree from the Presbyterian Seminary and was ordained as a minister in 2009.

Dear distinguished members of Congress, every human being has a right be respected. It is due to the fact that God created humans with his holiness. God gave us life that is the most precious gift to us. But, there is a power of malice that mercilessly infringe upon human

rights. That is the North Korean Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jung Un's three generations of hereditary dictatorship.

Kim Jong Un's dictatorship is one that kills its people because they believe in God. It's such an evil power that it kills its own people because they begged for food.

It is the Kim Jong Un regime that kills its own people because they left North Korea in order to survive from starvation and illnesses. Today, it is North Korea that kills its own people because they tried to go to democratic countries such as South Korea and America to obtain the very fundamental human rights. There is no life. There is no love. There are only corpses left. Because if there are no souls and freedom, then there is no life.

Dear distinguished members of Congress, I sincerely would like to ask you to listen carefully: Please listen to those groans and painful cries of the North Korean people. I sincerely would like to ask you to turn your attention to North Korea where there is the wrath of God. I respectfully would like to ask you to pay attention to those hopeless North Koreans who are perishing due to famine, illness, torture, and forced labor even at this moment. 60 years ago, North Korea was a prosperous land that God blessed. It used to be called Jerusalem of the East.

But now, it has become a barren land where there is not Good News of the Gospel. It is a blind spot that has the worst human rights. The 23 millions of North Koreans who are groaning due to the pain and hopelessness desperately plead to you all. The plea is that as long as Kim Jong Un's third generation of hereditary power lasts, its human rights violations will continue. They also plead that Kim Jong Un's regime that does not respect human rights will be judged by God accordingly. Moreover, those 23 millions of North Koreans plead to you all to punish the Kim Jong Un regime on their behalf.

Dear distinguished members of Congress, today, through this opportunity, I sincerely would like to ask you to help North Koreans find their freedom. Please pray for North Korea to become a place where there are no diseases. I beg you all to help North Koreans who flee to China to find their life and freedom. Please protest against the Chinese government. I would like to ask you to continuously push China to stop arresting and repatriating North Koreans in China. Please pray for them.

I also respectfully would like to ask you support and help us until Kim Jong Un's regime finally collapses and God's blessing appear again in North Korea. Again, please advocate for us until there is freedom just when the spring of freedom comes to the land of North Korea. We all also will pray to God and work harder for that day.

Thank you.