

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

Congressman Frank Wolf and Congressman James McGovern, thank you so much for organizing this hearing on North Korea, which continues to be the worst human rights tragedy occurring today. While we have not seen a return to the famine conditions that led to the death of at least 3 million people, the majority of North Koreans are still suffering, most spending their days trying to ensure their next meal for themselves and their families. In fact, we have heard from a recent high ranking defector that between 10 to 20,000 people have starved to death in South and North Hwanghae Provinces.

As the Kim Jong Un regime works to consolidate power, we see an increasing number of executions, purges, and growing numbers in the political prison camps. Amnesty International reported last year that the political prison camps, known to already imprison 200,000 men, women and children, were growing in size and scope.

Kim Jong il’s death in December led the regime to order that three generations of a family would be executed if one family member fled during the mourning period. The regime issued a shoot to kill policy for North Koreans trying to flee to China. Meanwhile the government of China has continued their illegal, cruel and inhumane practice of forcing North Koreans back to North Korea knowing they will most definitely face torture, imprisonment and even execution for fleeing their homeland.

China’s brutal and unlawful repatriation policy has led to the exploitation of North Korean women who in their vulnerability become the victims of traffickers and has created a lawless environment in China. We have seen Americans, Japanese, Chinese and South Koreans imprisoned in China for helping North Koreans and most recently South Korean citizen Kim Young Hwan was imprisoned and tortured in China, while last year a South Korean missionary Kim Chang-Whan was murdered by North Korean agents and another, Ho-Bin Kang, survived an assassination attempt only to be killed this May in a suspicious head on car crash. How ironic that China allows North Korean assassins to operate freely in its country, but will not allow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees any access to the region.

North Koreans are the only people in the world that do not enjoy one single human right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. How ironic that this document was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations in reaction to the atrocities committed during World War II by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, as 1948 is the same year that Kim Il Sung came to power to ensure that no North Korean would enjoy a single one of these universally accepted human rights.

We now have the eyewitness testimony of over 25,000 North Koreans who have fled to confirm these facts. We know from the testimony of Shin Dong Hyuk that children are not only imprisoned in the North Korean political prison camps, but are born there and can spend their entire lives there.

Is there chance for reform under the dictatorship of Kim Jong Un? I will submit that Kim and his regime will never take action that will be in the best interest of the North Korean people, only action that maintains their power. These recent pronouncements about Kim's economic reforms and a possible opening up are nothing more than an illusion.

However, Kim Jong Un's North Korea is not the North Korea of Kim Il Song or Kim Jong-il. There have been dramatic and unprecedented changes that have occurred as a result of the resiliency of the North Korean people.

Two major ways in which the regime has maintained power are gone: the public distribution system (PDS) and isolation.

The PDS, in which the regime distributed food and material goods, broke down during the famine years. This system made the entire population dependent on the regime for survival, but the resiliency of the North Korean people led them to start trading and selling among themselves leading to an explosion of private markets throughout North Korea to such an extent that the majority of the population now survives on their own through these markets. Capitalism is thriving in North Korea and attempts by the regime to shut down these markets repeatedly failed. Their last attempt in December 2009 to curb this economic activity with a currency devaluation led to such a public outcry that the regime backed down and actually apologized –something unprecedented.

The famine not only led to these private markets but it also led to the people to no longer trust the regime. Defectors tell us that in the past it was every citizens' strong desire to become a member of the Korean Worker's Party, the path to success in North Korea. But, now, their goals have changed: their desire now is to survive by making money and providing for their families.

Another powerful tool of the regime to maintain control is also gone ---isolation. The ability to cut the North Korean people off from the rest of the world is no longer possible. Decades of propaganda which convinced the North Korean people that they were the most advanced nation and lived in a wonderful paradise has totally unraveled as so much as information is getting into North Korea.

More and more North Koreans are listening to foreign radio broadcasts, watching South Korean soap operas and Western films that they now realize their regime has been telling lying to them about South Korea and the rest of the world. The film TITANIC became so widely watched in North Korea that the regime felt compelled to inform its people that the movie was a depiction of

the failure of capitalism -- the great ship, Titanic, symbolizing capitalism sunk on the same day as Kim Il Sung's birthday.

Perhaps, one of the greatest changes is the fact that over 25,000 North Koreans have fled and most are residing in South Korea and many are communicating with their family members providing another source of information about the outside world.

There is so much that we can do to help the North Korean people. First, because now they can hear us: our governments must make our human rights concerns the most important policy regarding North Korea, so that North Koreans know the truth: that we are not the yankee imperialists wolves trying to destroy them, but the United States and other countries have spent billions of dollars trying to feed them and save them from starvation.

Additionally, we must cut off the hard cash that flows into that regime that allows Kim to buy the loyalty of his elites. Enforcing sanctions against those banks doing business with North Korea is critical. Additionally, we must expose the exploitation of North Korean workers that is occurring in countries all over the world from Kuwait to Mexico, from Russia to the Netherlands. Right now it is estimated that the regime earns over \$110 million in cold cash by exploiting its own citizens with the complicity of countries that should know better.

Finally, our greatest hope is to invest in those who work to bring change to North Korea and we know what works best by simply looking at what the North Korea regime attacks. The most targeted defectors for assassination have been Kim Seong Min of Free North Korea Radio and Park Sang Hak of Fighters for a Free North Korea. What do these two have in common? Both are devoted to getting information into North Korea, Kim through radio broadcasting and Park through balloon launches in which he is sending in pamphlets of true history and facts about South Korea, DVDs of movies and USB sticks filled with information, radios, but also money – money as their “economic stimulus” to help boost the private markets.

Thank you for the care and concern you have shown for the people of North Korea by organizing this hearing.

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