

Testimony of **Shin Donghyuk**, Founder & Executive Director, Inside NK

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Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

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Translator for written testimony: Henry Song (US Director, Inside NK)

Interpreter to be used at hearing: Henry Song (US Director, Inside NK)

Good afternoon, Congressman Ed Royce, Congressman Chris Smith, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, and guests. Thank you for this invitation and for the honor of allowing me to testify today.

I want to express my gratitude for giving me an opportunity to speak about the reality of what is going in North Korea right now. This may be the first and last time that I will be able to share and speak at such a place like this.

My name is Shin Donghyuk, and I am from North Korea. My hometown is North Korea. However, I cannot go back to my hometown, because my hometown is the political prison camp. I was born in the political prison camp. My existence in the political prison camp in North Korea was an existence not fit for human beings or even animals.

The first thing I remember seeing with my eyes, were of the prison guards carrying rifles, and of political prisoners wearing prison uniforms; these were the only things that I remember seeing for the first time in the world of the North Korean political prison camp.

My father and mother who gave birth to me were political prisoners also, and the moment I was born, I too became a political prisoner as well. And everyone else around me, except for the guards and prison officials who carried out punishments and made our lives miserable and made us suffer, were all political prisoners as well.

The prison guards who carried rifles drilled into the heads of us young children inmates, the young and immature and ones who really didn't know anything, the following: “You are all prisoners. And your parents are prisoners as well. In order to repay the fact that you are alive, you must all work hard. You must work hard until you literally die, only then can you pay for your crimes.” We were all young, but somehow we knew and understood what the prison guards were telling us.

In the political prison camp, there was nothing the prisoners could do. We could only eat the food given to us, we could only wear the clothes given to us, and we could only do the work given to us.

When I was 14 years old, just like I learned from the rules and regulations of the political prison camp, when I overheard my mother and older brother talking about escaping, I then reported this to the prison officials. I myself was also dragged to the prison cell within the camp. I, who had reported my mother and older brother for talking about escaping, was rewarded with terrible, indescribably cruel and painful torture.

The prison guards tied my feet in metal shackles and hung me upside down and also tortured me over a burning fire pit.

Finally, my mother and older brother were publicly executed in front of all the prisoners in the camp, including myself. My father and I had to see them executed right before our eyes. I did not cry when I saw my mother and brother being executed. In the prison camp, we did not learn that if our mother and brother were killed, we were supposed to feel sadness and shed tears.

The torture I went through at that time – the scars from that terrible time, are ones I still bear clearly on my body; the scars from the metal shackles on my ankles; the burn scars on my back from the torture of being burned alive over a fire pit; the scars that formed all over my body from the beatings I endured – these vestiges of my suffering will never go away.

The prison guards of the North Korean political prison camps think of the human political prison camp inmates as less worthy than that of animals. The cruelest and most excruciating method of treating the prisoners is by denying them food and starving them. If a prisoner does not work well or fails to meet a work quota, they are punished by the prison guards; however, before punishment is carried out, the prisoners are given a choice of being punished by having a meal denied to them and thus going hungry, or getting punished by getting beaten by the prison guards.

In my case, going hungry – being denied food – was a suffering and pain beyond my imagination, so thus I chose the punishment of getting beaten. The reason why I say this today is that even now, as I speak before you in this chamber, there are still babies being born like I was born, and there are still people who are getting killed by public executions and dying from starvation and beatings.

I am not here in the US right now to go on sightseeing tours, or to visit tourist spots. I am not here to go on a tour of the US Capitol either. I am here today to testify and to tell all of you, the distinguished and esteemed members of the US Congress, sitting here before me – to help and save the political prisoners in the North Korean political prison camps who are dying and suffering right now. I am here to exhort you to save my brothers and sisters who are suffering and dying, to save them so that they might live, that they will not die but survive and live and come out of the prison camps so that they too can see and enjoy the bright and beautiful world that all of us take for granted and accept as normal and commonplace.

If this issue of the political prison camp inmates in North Korea is not solved through our concerted efforts and actions, and of that of the US Congress and international

organizations like the UN, then all the inmates in the prison camps created by the North Korean dictatorship, will die. And also, the citizens of North Korea who are suffering under this dictatorship will die.

In closing, I would like to make a request: All of you here, please open your eyes and look around you. And look for anyone among us who looks evil. In my eyes, there is no one here who looks evil. However, the heart of a human being can be so evil. Naïve and innocent looking people created the Nazi concentration camps such as Auschwitz, and committed the genocide of over 6 million people. It has been over sixty years since the political prison camps were formed in North Korea, and in these camps hundreds of thousands of political prisoners are awaiting their deaths.

My favorite word now is the word, "FREEDOM". If the North Korean dictator enjoys freedom, so should the people of North Korea enjoy and live in freedom. No one has the right to deny or take away freedom, which is in the DNA of humanity, from anyone else. I am powerless. Therefore I plead and exhort all of you here today. With your power and influence, you can save my helpless brothers and sisters who are waiting for death in North Korea.

The last, best hope for my suffering brothers and sisters in the political prison camps of North Korea is the international community, and, all of you sitting here before me.

Thank you.

Shin Donghyuk