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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

Hearing March 22, 2016, 2 pm: *Get It Right This Time: A Victims-Centered Trafficking in Persons Report*

Good afternoon, My name is Jinhye Jo, and I am the President of North Koreans in USA, a non-profit organization representing North Korean refugees in the United States.

I would like to thank members of Congress and Ms. Suzanne Scholte for giving me the opportunity to testify about the situation in North Korea, my home country. I have testified before in previous Congressional hearings about my family's story. Of the nine members of my family, only three survived and escaped from North Korea to gain our freedom.

However, today I stand here not to testify about my own experience eighteen years ago, but to speak of North Korea and China—two countries that have not changed their ways. Based on my own personal experience as a former refugee in China and now as the head of an organization today involved with rescuing refugees, I can state without hesitation that the situation facing North Korean refugees in China is more dangerous today than ever before. It is the Chinese government's failure to abide by international law that directly leads to the trafficking of North Korean refugees, especially women.

As is well known to the international community, three million North Koreans have starved to death, powerless in the face of a brutal dictatorship.

Furthermore, those who were caught trying to escape the country were deprived of their rights. Suffocating under the yoke of oppression, they died unjust deaths in mobile labor brigades and political prison camps.

Kim Jong-il, a dictator who atrociously murdered his own people, died before he could be brought to justice. Kim Jong-un, the third leader of this dynastic regime, continues to murder countless ordinary North Koreans through terror and starvation.

During Kim Jong-il's rule, the North Korean regime was brought to shame before the international community as videos of North Korean children dying on the streets spread on the Internet. In response, the regime mobilized groups of discharged soldiers into arresting *kotchebi*, or orphaned street children, who were then imprisoned in cold, dark detention centers and put into forced labor.

Many children died slow, painful deaths from malnutrition, barely surviving on lumps of corn and potato. The children whose parents went to search for food and did not return, the countless souls of those who perished behind bars—they all cry out in pain to this day, asking to be granted the freedom of peace, free from the pain of hunger. I know this first hand from what my mother, my sister, and I experienced when we were forcibly repatriated from China in June 2006.

The fathers who escape in search of food to save their family are forcibly repatriated by the Chinese government. Once repatriated into the custody of North Korea's State Security Department, its agents ruthlessly kick in the refugees' teeth and break their ribs. They are forced to endure the pain and humiliation of being beaten all over by metal rods. Their noses are smashed in, and their arms and legs are broken.

The mothers and daughters who escape North Korea are forcibly separated by Chinese brokers, who traffic North Korean women.

The parents who have left their children behind live in great pain, knowing that their children must live on the street as orphans. They shed tears of great sorrow and resentment, with no country to call their own.

Some younger North Korean women are dragged away by Chinese police and locked into dark, windowless rooms, where they are forced into sexual slavery in front of webcams.

It is said that Chinese men use cigarettes and hot spoons to burn the skin of North Korean women who do not obey their sexual demands. Women who try to resist, hiding beneath their blankets, are stomped on so severely that they almost die from internal bleeding. These women are then thrown in front of police stations, left to die on the street.

The organization I lead, NKinUSA, was able to rescue such women with the generous support of ordinary Americans and Korean-American church groups.

I would like to speak about a seventeen-year old North Korean girl, who has now resettled in the United States. She was arrested in China and forcibly repatriated to North Korea, the country she had tried to escape. After bribing the North Korean security agents with Chinese money, she was released and succeeded in escaping to China once again.

However, because she could not speak Chinese, she was dragged away by human traffickers. She was raped and forcibly impregnated. The broker then force-fed medication to this seventeen-year old girl to induce abortion.

This girl, who barely survived, was rescued and brought to the United States.

I would also like to speak about the heartbreaking story of a North Korean mother. Her two children, one of them two years old and the other three years old, starved to death. After burying her children next to her husband's grave, she left North Korea to find a way to survive.

However, she became ensnared by human traffickers and was raped several times. She was forced to give birth to children whose fathers she did not know.

One of the men she was sold to tried to sell the baby to another family. Furious that she would not give birth to his child, he beat her whenever he became drunk.

I have spoken of only two of the many women that our organization was able to rescue. Forcibly repatriated to North Korea in 2013 and 2014, they bribed the guards into being released, using money they had hidden inside their bodies. Upon escaping once again, they managed to contact our organization.

We did our best to raise the funds necessary to rescue these women, but we were unable to help everyone who reached out to us, desperate for freedom. One of them was Ms. Kim, who suffered frostbite on her feet after the Chinese government forcibly repatriated her. When it was discovered that she had attempted to escape to South Korea, she was beaten so severely by agents of the State Security Department that she fainted. We were told that she was then "taken somewhere else." This can only mean that she is dead.

The Chinese government is fully aware of this reality.

It is clear that those who have escaped North Korea must be recognized as refugees under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Regardless, the People's Republic of China continues to violate the Refugee Convention, assisting Kim Jong-un by forcibly repatriating North Korean refugees.

Moreover, the Chinese border security unit in Tumen County, Yanji, Liaoning Province treats North Korean refugees in the same way that the North Korean regime does. The guards torture and abuse the refugees after locking them up behind bars.

My family was also arrested for the supposed “crime” of helping North Koreans escape and imprisoned for one year and three months.

In particular, the women had to endure the suffering and humiliation of using pieces of dirty blankets as sanitary pads. For this, the guards beat us mercilessly. After making all the female prisoners in a cell stand in a line, they kicked and beat all of us, one at a time.

Even pregnant women, the elderly, and children are forced to squat for hours on end with their arms raised. Anyone who leaned on a wall out of exhaustion was beaten with a rubber club until they were bruised all over.

The U.S. government and the international community cannot ignore the suffering and misery of North Korean refugees. It must not turn a blind eye to such unspeakable human rights violations taking place across China.

I bear no ill will towards the Chinese people. I only seek to criticize the wrongdoings of the Chinese government, which knowingly returns North Korean refugees to certain death.

Many of the individuals who brazenly treat North Korean women like animals and engage in trafficking are also Chinese government officials.

It is not befitting of a country that claims to be a great power to murder people and aid and abet in the appalling crime of trafficking women. The People’s Republic of China must fully recognize its past wrongdoings. It must recognize North Korean refugees, who have been deprived of their freedom, as refugees.

Kim Jong-un and the North Korean regime, which clings to its hopeless and absurd policies, cannot be allowed to exist any longer. If the Chinese government continues to cooperate with the North Korean regime, it will only become the object of scorn to the entire world.

As stated in international law, our fellow North Korean brothers and sisters are refugees. I respectfully call upon the Chinese government to respect and abide by its obligations under international law.

I would like to thank God for granting me the freedom to speak my mind. I would like to ask all of you to not ignore our suffering.

North Korean defectors, including myself, will continue to speak out until the day Kim Jong-un is brought to justice in an international court for his atrocious crimes. I would like to ask the United States Congress and the entire world to listen to our voices and to help us in every way that you can.

Thank you.