

Hyeona Ji – Ms. Ji is a North Korean defector, human rights activist, and writer. Her entire family decided to escape North Korea in 1998, after her father listened to a South Korean radio broadcast while on a visit to China. Her family members decided to leave separately to avoid suspicion, but while in China, her father was arrested, and has never been heard from since. Ms. Ji herself was soon arrested and repatriated to North Korea; during this first repatriation in February 1998, she was harshly interrogated and beaten, and witnessed other repatriated North Koreans (adults, children and pregnant women) undergo beatings and invasive searches for hidden money. Ms. Ji escaped North Korea again in April of 1998, leaving behind her younger brother, to search for her mother and sister in China. She was caught by sex traffickers and sold for 25,000 Chinese Yuan.

In April of 1999 she was arrested by Chinese authorities and forcibly repatriated again for the second time and was sent to the 'Jeung-san' kyo-hwa-so #11 where she was held for almost a year. Before she was sent to the reeducation prison camp, while being interrogated by the security officials in a prison collection facility, she witnessed repatriated North Korean women undergo forced abortions, and in one case, witnessed prison guards kill a newborn baby birthed by a repatriated North Korean mother. Ms. Ji suffered broken ribs as a result of the beatings and mistreatment.

During her incarceration at Jeung-san reeducation prison camp, she was subject to hard labor and endured harsh beatings and torture, including being forced to eat grass mixed with mud when she was caught eating grass without permission, and also beaten on the head with a wooden plank for working too slow. Ms. Ji also witnessed countless number of inmates die from malnutrition, diarrhea and mistreatment. She was released from the prison camp as part of a nationwide pardon of inmates on Kim Jung Il's birthday, in February 16, 2000.

In November of 2000, she escaped North Korea for the third time. In 2002 she was arrested and forcibly repatriated to North Korea again, this time while three months pregnant; upon her arrival in North Korea, she underwent a forced abortion without anesthetics - almost dying from blood loss - at the hands of the North Korean authorities. Ms. Ji was about to be sentenced to the "Hamheung" kyo-hwa-so #9, without even going through a fair trial, but thanks to a compassionate security official, she was able to avoid further incarceration, and in October of that same year, escaped North Korea again.

Since her arrival in South Korea in 2007, Ms. Ji has been very active as a human rights activist in South Korea and abroad, telling the world of her experience of multiple escapes and forced repatriation, and being sold into a human trafficking ring while in China. In 2011 she wrote a book titled, 'A Thousand Miles for Freedom', published in South Korea, which has become a bestseller; a musical drama called 'Tears

of God' was produced based on her book. In 2012 she started a one-person protest against the Chinese government's forced repatriation policy of North Korean refugees, in the city of Gwangju, South Korea, where she has collected thousands of signatures in her petition drive to raise awareness.

Ms. Ji is one of the few female voices in the North Korean defector community working to raise awareness throughout the world about the situation in North Korea. She is currently the co-chairperson of WWCSGNK (Worldwide Coalition to Stop Genocide in North Korea); Vice-Chair of the International PEN North Korean Writers-in-Exile Center; Director of the NKDSS (a coalition of NK defector university students); correspondent for the Tongil News newspaper; and Gwangju city Director for the North Korea Democratization Committee. She has also worked for Voice of the Martyrs Korea in the past, and currently attends Jeonnam University full time majoring in Political Science and Diplomacy, while speaking as a lecturer at various events and venues throughout South Korea and elsewhere. Ms. Ji was also the second witness to testify at the UN COI's visit and investigation in Seoul.

In 2017, she became the South Korea Representative for 'Stepping Stones', a collaborative North Korea human rights NGO formed by defectors in the UK and in South Korea that seeks to raise awareness regarding the forced repatriation policy of North Korean refugees by the Chinese government, and help North Korean children and women refugees in third countries and fight for their human rights. Ms. Ji also released a second book, this time a book of poetry titled, 'The Last Gift', in memory of the inmates who perished at Jeungsan reeducation prison camp.