

Suzanne Scholte, Seoul Peace Prize Laureate
President, Defense Forum Foundation; Chair, North Korea Freedom Coalition
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
“Protecting North Korean Refugees” Tuesday, December 12, 2017

Thank you to Congressman Chris Smith and Congresswoman Karen Bass for your leadership on this subcommittee and bringing attention to the crisis facing North Korea refugees in China. I also want to acknowledge Congressmen Ed Royce and Eliot Engel for their leadership on the North Korea human rights issues in the Congress and the ways they have worked together in strong bi-partisan partnership to advance human rights globally.

I wish to make three main points:

-- The situation facing North Korean refugees in China is worse than ever because of Xi Jinping's illegal and inhuman repatriation policy. Xi has brought us to a crisis stage with just two options for China.

--We need to recognize what the people of North Korea have done internally and externally to change their circumstances and support the work of the defector led organizations. These defector led NGOs are our greatest weapon for peaceful regime change and the avoidance of conflict.

--We must keep the human rights issues – our concerns for the people of North Korea -- at the forefront of our policies especially now with the escalating threats by Kim Jong Un. Otherwise, we play directly into Kim's propaganda that justifies his nuclear ambitions: that we are the enemy of the people of North Korea.

Despite the fact that the world has finally come to recognize what defectors have been telling us for decades that the Kim Jong Un regime is committing crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights, there has not been any improvement in the lives of the people of North Korea and the situation facing the refugees today is worse than ever before. There is nothing that Kim Jong Un fears more than his own people for they are the ones who have educated us about the reality of their suffering. They are the also the ones leading the efforts to change the hearts and minds of the people of North Korea.

Today, we are relying on China to help us make sanctions effective to try to reign in Kim Jong-un's nuclear ambitions, but if China continues to forcefully repatriate men, women, and children back to North Korea to face certain torture, certain imprisonment and in some cases execution, what does that tell us about Xi Jinping's sincerity?

The international community must insist that China end its cruel, inhumane, and illegal repatriation policy. North Korean defectors describe China's policy as a *“death sentence for North Koreans.”* I have pointed out in previous testimony before this Committee this important fact: unlike any refugees in the world, North Korean refugees have a place to go for immediate resettlement as they are citizens of South Korea under the South Korean constitution. There is absolutely no reason for China to continue this policy.

North Korean defectors testified during this April's North Korea Freedom Week that 80% of North Korean defectors carry poison to kill themselves if they are caught by the Chinese authorities. This summer a family of five North Koreans including a senior member of the North Korea's Worker's Party, his wife, son and two daughters, were arrested by Chinese security forces. They begged them not to force them back to North Korea, but following orders from Beijing the Chinese police escorted them to the North Korean border. Fearing certain torture, imprisonment and possible execution, the family of five all committed suicide by taking poison. North Korean defectors would rather die than be repatriated to North Korea.

We saw earlier this month the desperate escape of a North Korean soldier who was shot multiple times as he fled across the DMZ to South Korea.

The Chinese government continues to refuse to allow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees any access to these refugees but gives free reign to the agents of the DPRK's Ministry of State Security to hunt down refugees and to murder those who try to help them. Even Chinese citizens have been jailed and murdered for helping North Korean refugees. Most recently we have seen the suspected abduction of a South Korean deacon Kim Won Ho in March 2016 and the murder of Chinese Pastor Han Choong-ryeol in April 2016. Both were involved in assisting North Korea refugees. These are just two examples of many cases of disappearances and suspicious deaths of those who try to assist North Korean refugees, but there are also numerous examples of Americans, South Koreans and Japanese getting arrested and imprisoned for doing something that in most countries of the world would earn acclaim: helping homeless refugees. For example, American citizens Steve Kim of New York and John Yoon of Washington served time in prison in China for helping refugees.

So, China not only forcibly repatriates North Korean refugees back to North Korea, it criminalizes those who try to assist them, and works closely with the DPRK to make the border region of China and North Korea one of the most dangerous borders in the world.

Contributing to the North Korean refugee crisis has been China's one child policy. There is a shortage of women in China. So, you have a country with a shortage of women, China, and a neighboring country, North Korea, where the women are struggling to feed their starving families, which created a horrific situation when famine struck North Korea: the trafficking of North Korean women. Most North Korean females who cross that border get trafficked: sold as wives to Chinese men, sold into forced prostitution or internet pornography

And when these women are forced back to North Korea and discovered to be pregnant, the DPRK regime's policy is to force these North Korean women to undergo abortions because the babies are "half Chinese."

These decades of abuse of North Korean women in China has led to another crisis: stateless children in China, whose mothers are North Korean, and many cases of North Korean mothers being separated from their Chinese born children when they eventually are able to escape to South Korea.

We have now reached a crisis point because of Xi Jinping's support for the Kim dictatorship and there are only two choices left for China:

Continue to support the Kim dictatorship and ensure an escalating nuclear arms race in Asia which could have horrific and devastating consequences for Korea especially OR work with South Korea and the international community for peaceful unification under South Korea's leadership.

The people of China know the future is with South Korea, NOT North Korea. Even Chinese leaders and writers have expressed this view. Chinese General Wang wrote in the *Global Times* in December 2014 that *China "had cleaned up the DPRK mess too many times"* and that *"collapse is just a matter of time."* While he was editor of the *Study Times*, the journal for the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China, Deng Yuwen, wrote that China should *"give up on Pyongyang and press for the reunification of the Korean peninsula."* He lost his editorship but his words resonated. More recently he wrote: *"North Korea will ultimately fail no matter how much you throw money at it, and it is in the process of collapse."*

These Chinese leaders realize the future is with South Korea and it is time for China to stop being complicit in North Korea's crimes against humanity and end support of the Kim regime.

Just one recent example to illustrate this point: China was very much opposed to South Korea's deployment of the missile defense system, THAAD, but South Korea only felt THAAD was necessary because of Kim Jong Un's threats.

Second point, we are failing to recognize and appreciate what the people of North Korea have done through their own self determination. We need to recognize what the people of North Korea have done internally and externally to change their circumstances and support the work of the defector led organizations. These defector led NGOs are our greatest weapon for peaceful regime change and the avoidance of conflict.

We all see the pictures of the goose stepping soldiers and the fawning men and women before the Kim statues and think it is a hopeless situation. But in this great darkness of North Korea, I see the light of the people of North Korea. The reality is that the people of North Korea have accomplished amazing things making the North Korea of Kim Jong Un dramatically different than the North Korea of Kim Jong Il or Kim Il Song.

First of all, it is the people of North Korea who have educated us so that no longer can we deny that the triple Kim dictatorships have committed and are committing crimes against humanity. Over 30,000 have escaped to bear witness.

Second, it is the women of North Korea, through their own self determination, who created the market system, so that capitalism is thriving in North Korea and is why people are surviving today. Attempt after attempt by the regime to control these markets failed and the last attempt in 2009 to reassert control over the economy with a currency devaluation caused such a backlash from the people of North Korea, the regime stepped back and now allows these markets to function.

It is the people of North Korea, hungry for information and fascinated by South Korean soap operas and Western movies, that have educated themselves, so that they are far more knowledgeable about the outside world.

It is the people of North Korea who escaped who have taken up the work of saving their people and getting information into North Korea. The defectors are the ones who have been most successful in rescuing North Koreans. I know one woman, the Harriet Tubman of the North Korean underground railroad, who has rescued 7000 people from her homeland.

Defectors have also taken up the work that we use to do of getting information into North Korea. For example, Park Sang Hak of Fighters for Free North Korea regularly sends in leaflets of information, shortwave radios, usbs, and money for the markets via balloon launches. Park's messages include true information about South Korea, true history, and important news. He states: "All I am doing is sending letters home about the truth." His most recent balloon launches informed the people of North Korea that Kim Jong Un murdered his own half brother and also told them about the murder of Otto Warmbier, so that North Koreans would know about these horrible crimes.

It is defectors like Choi Jeong Un, Choi Joo Hwal, and Cha Ri-hyuk of the North Korea People's Liberation Front who have sent in 12,000 notels, 400 shortwave radios and 50,000 USBs with information, and batteries. Because the electricity situation is dire, they are also smuggling in batteries for the notels and the radios.

They are especially reaching out to the military in North Korea. They are sharing with them the history of what happened in Rumania when the military sided with the people against the dictator and ended the dictatorship there and calling for them to do that for North Koreans.

Every North Korea Freedom Week begins with a very emotional ceremony led by the North Korea People's Liberation Front, men and women who served in the North Korea military. Having been raised to hate Americans and believe that we caused the Korean War, these former North Korean soldiers go to the Korean War Memorial and lay a wreath and pledge to honor the sacrifice Americans made for South Korea's freedom by dedicating themselves to North Korea's freedom.

Another defector organization is Free North Korea Radio, which is broadcasting every day into North Korea and can be heard throughout North Korea and the border region in China. It is staffed by North Korean defectors and was founded by Kim Seong Min, a former DPRK Army captain.

The greatest weapon we have in dealing with North Korea is the truth and the best tellers of the truth are the defectors who have escaped. I will give you several clear examples that prove this point.

During North Korea Freedom Week 2015 defectors wrote a declaration stating: *"We are North Korean defectors who left parents, siblings, and other family behind in North Korea. Those we love are still in North Korea, and because we know better than anyone how they are living we are working for the rights of the North Korean people...Our goals are to make North Korean society a democracy and a reunified Korea a country that can play a role in spreading peace throughout the world, starting in East Asia."*

In August 2015 when two South Korean soldiers were maimed by land mines planted by the North Korean military, South Korea decided to turn the loud speakers back on at the DMZ that had been silenced since the Sunshine Policy. For three days, they played *K-Pop music*, and regular South Korean news programming. But on the fourth day the South Korean government -- on those loud speakers -- started broadcasting the programs of Free North Korea Radio. What happened next: North Korea immediately demanded to go back to the negotiating table. During the September 2015 negotiations, North Korea did not ask for a peace treaty, which they always are asking for; North Korea did not ask for the end of ROK-US military exercises, which they are always asking for. North Korea only asked for one thing during the September 2015 negotiation and that was: "Turn off the loud speakers." The North Korea regime could not have their soldiers and citizens hear the voices of their brothers and sisters living in freedom in South Korea.

One of the exciting things we do is provide special programs for Free North Korea Radio to help them communicate to the people of North Korea that we are not their enemy, and we certainly do not "occupy South Korea" as they are brainwashed to believe. In fact, the friendship between America and South Korea is what helped propel South Korea into the 11th largest economy in the world.

One of the programs we started a few years ago is to send messages to North Korea from American leaders during Seollal (Korean New Year) and on August 15th (Korean Liberation Day). We asked Members of the U.S. Congress to send us messages of what they would like to say to the PEOPLE of North Korea, to share their hopes and dreams. Our hope was to show through your words how much the American people care about the people of North Korea. These messages were powerful, and the response from North Korea was amazing from the radio station's informants.

One man in North Korea reported *"The [North Korean] government always mentions that America is our total enemy but a lot of people already know that America is the most developed and democratic country...I never*

imagined that politicians from the U.S. would have participated in the radio show, which is run by North Korean defectors, and send messages to North Koreans.”

Another citizen said *“We never dare to say Kim Jung Eun’s government should be collapsed, so that people can live peacefully. However, I am extremely happy that someone else could say this for us.”*

During this past April’s North Korea Freedom Week the defectors brought with them something truly amazing: Hand woven silk portraits made of three Members of Congress by two brothers living in Pyongyang who listen to Free North Korea Radio. If they had been caught doing this, they would have been executed. The portraits were smuggled out with this message: *“Tell the American politicians who delivered the messages. My brother and I spent three months making them late into the night. Please tell them there are some people in a dark place who still have hope because of South Korea and the US.”*

One other indicator of the importance of this work is see who is on Kim Jong Un’s assassination list: this list tells you who he fears most. Number one on the list is Kim Seong Min, the founder and director of Free North Korea Radio, and number two is Park Sang Hak, the founder and director of Fighters for Free North Korea.

The defectors tell us that if they had the resources to carry out their programs getting information in and out of North Korea the regime could end in three years or less; otherwise it could survive for another five to ten years. Balloon launches, radio broadcasting, smuggling in USBs, Notels, utilizing drones, which is the newest method being utilized, are ALL critical because of the different ways to reach people in the different regions of North Korea.

Finally third and last point, we must keep the human rights issues – our concerns for the people of North Korea -- at the forefront of our policies especially now with the escalating threats by Kim Jong Un. Otherwise, we play directly into Kim’s propaganda that justifies his nuclear ambitions: that we are the enemy of the people of North Korea. We must communicate to the people of North Korea that what the United States wants for them is to enjoy the same freedoms that South Koreans and Americans enjoy.

We need to emphasize that the friendship with the United States and the freedoms in South Korea are what led South Korea, out of the ashes and devastation of the Korean War, to become in a relatively short period the 11th largest economy in the world. When we fail to put human rights at the forefront and focus exclusively on the nuclear issue we feed into the lie that Kim Jong Un tells the people of North Korea: we are their enemy and want to destroy them and therefore North Korea must have nuclear weapons.

For example, the speech that President Donald Trump gave in Seoul was exactly the right message. I have worked on North Korea human rights issues for over 20 years and that was the best speech any American -- or South Korean -- President has ever given about what our brothers and sisters in North Korea have suffered under the triple Kim dictatorships.

During North Korea Freedom Week, the defectors kept repeating: *the truth will set them free. the truth will set them free. Help us get the truth to North Korea.* To underscore these points, I have brought with me further proof about the importance of the people of North Korea. I am presenting to you this book *The Accusation* – the only dissident book from North Korea. It was smuggled out of North Korea and published in English earlier this year. The author is still living in North Korea and he chose to use the pseudonym, Bandi. Bandi is Korean for Firefly as he is the Firefly shining a light out of the darkness of North Korea.

He is just another example of the amazing spirit of the people of North Korea, the light shining out of the darkness, another North Korean risking his life just to get you his message from his homeland to you. Thank you.

###