

## February 25, 2004: North Korea: Expand nuclear talks to include human rights and refugee issues

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WASHINGTON - Press reports coming out of the Six Party Talks currently underway in Beijing suggest that the United States and other parties to the talks - China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea - are preparing to move forward with humanitarian and economic assistance on the basis of security concessions alone from North Korea. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has concluded that the Six Party Talks provide an opportunity for the United States to address the North Korean regime's atrocious human rights actions by linking nuclear security and human security. The agenda of the Six Party Talks should be expanded to include human rights and refugee issues. Pyongyang has reportedly indicated in recent months that it expects the Six Party Talks to lead not only to security guarantees but also to economic, humanitarian, and energy assistance. This offers a real chance to link any promised aid on tough and verifiable agreements in such areas as family reunification, food security, and refugee protection and human rights, including religious freedom. "Neither quiet diplomacy nor public shame has provided the leverage needed to improve the lives of ordinary North Koreans. In fact, in the past several years, famines, food shortages, and asylum seekers have created a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. Any security pact that allows the North Korean regime a free hand to commit further atrocities is both a strategic and moral failure. It is unconscionable for the United States to buy peace without acting to end the slaughter and starvation of innocents in North Korea," said USCIRF Chair Michael K. Young. The North Korean regime is one of the world's worst violators of human rights. Evidence of this is already well-documented. Kim Jong Il, and his father Kim Il Sung, have systematically starved millions, forced hundreds of thousands into a vast labor camp system, and stamped out all vestiges of free religious practice. The North Korean military recently lowered height requirements for adult male conscripts from 4 feet, 11 inches to 4 feet, 2 inches due to widespread stunted growth in the population. As policy-makers search for a solution to North Korea's nuclear blackmail they must consider the ways that the regime's human rights abuses are a cause of regional instability. North Korea has abducted hundreds of Japanese and South Korean citizens to train as spies or to use as pawns in diplomatic negotiations. The dire situation in North Korea has also led up to 300,000 North Koreans to flee to China where they live without international protections and in constant fear of arrest and possible execution if repatriated.

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