

November 15, 2005: Press Conference on North Korea Report: "Thank You Father Kim Il Sung"

U.S.
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
"THANK YOU FATHER KIM IL SUNG"
November 15, 2005
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MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, we'll start momentarily. Thank you for coming. My name is Michael Cromartie. I'm the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. And due to time constraints, before I make my opening comments on this very important study, some members of the Congress are here, and we're delighted to have them.

Congressman Royce, could we hear from you first? Thank you, sir, for taking time to be with us.

REPRESENTATIVE ED ROYCE (D-CA): Thank you. I'm Congressman Ed Royce from Orange County, California, and I'll have to leave shortly for an appointment with Chairman Hyde, so I'm going to be brief. But let me begin by saying how much I appreciate the good work that Chairman Smith and Chairman Wolf have both brought to the attention of this issue and for being here today. And I'd like to thank the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for commissioning what is here a very, very important work. David Hawk, who authored "The Hidden Gulag," documenting North Korea's prison camps, has given us another excellent report. It was often said that we know very little about what is actually going on inside what we call the "hermit kingdom," but this report helps us peel back the layers of secrecy that hamper our view of North Korea and it helps us shine light on the regime in Pyongyang. North Korean defectors are the ones that are helping pull back this curtain, and we appreciate their contribution to this.

And of course, the picture that is emerging to us is horrific. In that society, replacing religion, as you and I know it is the establishment of a quasi-religious cult of personality, centered first on Kim Il Sung, and then on his son, Kim Jong Il. When the country's system of 51 social classes was developed, religious believers ranked at the very bottom, the 51st class. Religion is replaced by Juche, which is sort of a very Spartan concept of self-reliance, so those discovered worshipping are publicly executed in this society.

And I could go on with all of the violations of human rights and of religious freedom, but critics will no doubt say about this report, why are we worrying about human rights in North Korea? We need to worry about their nuclear weapons program. That should be the focus. I've heard that

criticism in Seoul, as chairman of the U.S.-Korean Inter-parliamentary Exchange. I'd encourage frankly the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to distribute this report widely in South Korea as well, but I am surprised when I hear those say that bringing up the North's human rights abuses only gets in the way of disarming them of their weapons of mass destruction. And I say that because the human rights situation in North Korea is reality. And if this is how the regime treats its own people, it brings into serious question how much faith we can place with the North Korean regime. I've been encouraged by the dialogue that has begun with North Korea, but let's have a dialogue based on a clear understanding of what we are dealing with. Ignoring human rights gives us a false picture of whom we are confronting, and that's why 'trust but verify' has to be an important part of this negotiation.

To that end, I am convinced that a concerted international focus on the North Korean regime's human rights violations is the way to bring us closer to peace and closer to stability in Northeast Asia.

It is also the moral policy, given the horrendous human rights condition north of that border. This report is another step in taking us toward that goal of peace. Thank you very much, all of you who have had a role in preparing it.

MR. CROMARTIE: Congressman Smith, thank you for coming.

REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPHER SMITH (R-NJ): Thank you. I'll be very brief, but I want to thank Michael and Bishop Ramirez, who earlier today testified in this room on their outstanding work on behalf of religious freedom in a report that the Commission has produced that is truly not only accurate but makes a number of very significant recommendations. And just as I think many of you know, there was as Policy Focus on China, a report that was released just last week that is a very incisive piece of work in documenting the abuses, and this new report, "Thank You Father Kim Il Sung," with its eyewitnesses' accounts of the ongoing repression in North Korea is just a must-read for anybody who cares about human rights.

North Korea's human rights abuses, as we know, is a nightmare of epic proportions. The government of North Korea is a totalitarian Stalinist regime, and its dictator, Kim Jong Il, brainwashes citizens into following a cult of personality and demands god-like reverence. He enjoys a decadent, opulent lifestyle himself while hundreds of thousands of children and their parents starve to death. Inside North Korea there is no genuine freedom of speech, religion, or assembly, yet North Korea has so restricted first-hand knowledge of what goes on in its gulag society that it has managed to convince many people that the situation cannot be as bad as the critics portray it. In a sense, they are right. It is worse than any one of us could make up.

This new report, based on careful interviews with former North Koreans,

makes it crystal clear that there is no religious freedom in North Korea. Religious people, their families and descendants are legally relegated to a subordinate position in society where they are last in line for education, healthcare, housing and food, in a society where even the favored classes are finding it hard to get enough to eat. A tiny number of selected individuals are allowed to practice some of their ancestral religions under the tight control of the state, but all are compelled to worship and there is no other way to describe it - Kim Il Sung. Those who are from non-Christian backgrounds who convert to Christianity, those who are caught with Bibles or Christian literature are subject to horrific punishments, including public executions.

President Bush was clearly correct in labeling North Korea, as a nation, as part of an axis of evil. The report makes many excellent recommendations, but I'd like to focus on those regarding the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, which Congress overwhelmingly passed. At a recent hearing held jointly by my committee, Africa, Global Human Rights and International Ops, and Jim Leach's committee, the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, it became patently obvious that the U.S. is acting far too lethargically in implementing the provisions of that law. I strongly endorse the Commission's recommendations to ensure that Special Envoy Lefkowitz has full authority to fulfill his mandate according to the North Korea Human Rights Act, work with countries in the region to provide safe haven, secure transit and resettlement for North Korean refugees, resolve bureaucratic issues, complicating the resettlement of North Korean refugees in the United States, expand radio, television, Internet and print information and other media to the North Korean people, and insist that the Chinese government fulfill its obligations as a party to the 1951 U.N. convention relating to the status of refugees, and the '67 protocol on the status of refugees.

By its refusal to treat North Korean refugees as refugees, China acts as the greatest-single facilitator of the crimes of this monstrous regime. China routinely classifies North Korean asylum seekers as mere "economic migrants," and returns them to North Korea without granting them proper hearings and without regard to the persecution they will face upon their return. Yet this report makes it clear, the testimony of refugees who have escaped makes nonsense of China's contention that these refugees are economic migrants.

As President Bush finally heads to South Korea for the APEC summit, and then to China for the summit with President Hu, it is imperative that he raise, with his interlocutors, not only North Korea's dangerous nuclear ambitions but also its refusal to abide by even minimal human rights standards. A regime that pays not the slightest attention to the needs, interests or rights of his own people is unlikely to care much what the international community really thinks.

Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Finally I'd like to introduce Congressman Frank Wolf. Thank you, Congressman, for joining us.

REPRESENTATIVE FRANK WOLF (R-VA): Thank you. Before I begin, I want to thank the Bishop and the other members and the staff of the Commission. In the last couple of weeks they have had two profound reports, the one a week and a half ago with regard to China, and this one, to speak truth to the powerful, to make sure that this administration and other administrations around the world cannot neglect what's taking place. I think when the North Korean government falls and we get into North Korea, we're going to see things that are so horrendous. And so I just want to thank the Commission and the staff members for the great job that they have done.

A quote: "Having faith in God is an act of espionage. Kim Il Sung is God in North Korea."

These chilling words came from a North Korean refugee, one of 40 interviewed by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which undertook to give a more comprehensive picture of religious freedom in North Korea, a nation which once again earned the onerous distinction of being named a country of particular concern by the U.S. State Department just last week. The Commission's extensive interviews provide a heart-wrenching picture of life inside North Korea, where the government attempts to control all information, expression and media; where they execute political prisoners, opponents of the regime, repatriated defectors, members of the underground church, and others, often and in public, where religious freedom simply does not exist.

Some of the North Koreans interviewed for the report personally witnessed public executions of religious believers. One particular account consisted of the shooting deaths of two people caught with Bibles in 1997.

Children as young as 4th grade were assembled to witness their punishment. In another instance, one of the interviewees was forcibly repatriated in 1999, fettered and hung outside a window in freezing weather. He was beaten, interrogated until he admitted to the, quote, "crime" of having studied at a Korean-Chinese church while in China. Contact with both Korean and Chinese believers, and South Korean, is considered a political offense by the North Korean government.

I've heard it said that the clearest picture, figuratively and literally, of the situation in North Korea is from the air: bright lights in the South, complete darkness in the North. The maniacal cult of personality perpetrated by Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il, has led to horrific, horrific - which we now know more about as a result of this but we will know much more about when the government changes - horrific situation, virtually unparalleled around the globe. Probably nowhere else around the globe has it gone to the extent and to the degree that it's gone on here.

The commission's study and recommendations come at a key time with President Bush scheduled to meet with the presidents of South

Korea and China

respectively later this week. Both countries are a natural destination for North Korean refugees. Among the many human rights concerns that must be raised with China - and I saw a public report that it didn't look like a lot of these issues were going to be raised publicly, but we hope they are, and there is still time, if they're not on the list, to make sure that they raise them publicly, and also, when the president gives speeches and speaks in a public manner, not only raise them publicly with the leaders but also when he speaks out so the Chinese people can hear him, are there efforts to forcibly return North Koreans, in violation of China's international human rights and refugee protection obligation? It is critical that these issues be raised, not just privately but publicly and in tandem with other matters, including resolution of North Korea's nuclear aspirations.

Last year I included funding for the Human Rights Conference, at the request of Congressman Chris Smith and many non-governmental organizations that work on this issue, and because of Chris Smith we have passed this religious freedom bill that came out of this committee when many wanted to kill the bill, but because of Chris I'm pleased to announce that the conference will take place next month in Seoul and will be widely attended by activists and scholars from around the globe. The pictures, the stories, the desperation that marks life in North Korea is heart-wrenching and is only beginning to be known to its full extent after years of secrecy.

The Commission's report and the Human Rights Conference will shine a bright light on the darkness that is currently in North Korea. So, again, I want to thank the Commission and the Commission and the members. Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, Congressman Wolf.

For the past - let me just say at a Commission hearing on North Korea in Los Angeles last year, we invited Mr. David Hawk to brief us on his acclaimed report, "Hidden Gulag." "The Hidden Gulag" was effective because it provided first-hand observations of systematic human rights abuses, detention and torture, and the testimony that David Hawk compiled from North Korean refugees and defectors provided evidence of a massive gulag system and overwhelmed objections that such claims were exaggerated and anti-North Korean propaganda.

The Commission recognized the need to produce a similar testimony on the North Korean government suppression of a once-vibrant religious intellectual life in North Korea, and since there has been a dearth of accurate information about the status of religious freedom in North Korea, we wanted to provide first-hand information on the day-to-day life of religious persons in North Korea. We wanted to lift the veil a bit on life inside North Korea and to provide first-hand observations of North Korean government's policies related to

freedom of religion or belief.

Well, David Hawk agreed to undertake this study, and we are unveiling it here today. David was ably assisted by two South Korean academics, Jae Chun won and Philo Kim, and by the Commission staff, in completing this report. But before we introduce David, I want to give my colleague and Commissioner Bishop Ramirez a chance to make some comments.

Bishop?

BISHOP RICARDO RAMIREZ: It is a telling fact that "Thank You Father Kim Il Sung" is the first phrase North Korean parents are instructed to teach their children. North Korean citizens are surrounded by the all-encompassing personality cult of the great leader, Kim Il Sung and his son, the dear leader Kim Jong Il. Every home in the country has a portrait of the two Kims. Inspectors visit homes to hand out fines and admonishments if the portraits are not well kept. Every government building and subway car has two pictures visible and every adult citizen wears a button of Kim Il Sung. Movies and propaganda constantly repeat the blessings bestowed on them by the two Kims. Schoolchildren are required to memorize the wisdom of the Kims and every citizen is required to attend one of the 450,000 Kim Il Sung revolutionary research centers, which citizens visit at least weekly for instruction, inspiration and self-criticism. The veneration required is so complete that most of those interviewed for this study did not believe that any religious activity was permitted because, among other reasons, it would constitute a threat to the regime's authority.

As this study shows, the Kim dynasty is much more than an authoritarian government. It is also the ultimate source of power, virtue, spiritual wisdom and truth for the North Korean people. The study we are introducing today is the first of its kind by a U.S. government agency. It offers stringent testimony on the character of the Kim Jong Il government and the extent to which it controls the thoughts and beliefs of the North Korean people. It includes eyewitness accounts of public executions, the survival of limited religious activity in North Korea, and concerted policies to quash religious activity stemming from cross-border contacts with China. North Korea may be the only country in the world that views China's religious freedom conditions as too lenient. The Commission traveled to China in August and has recently released a trip report, which we will be happy to provide if anyone is interested.

Our desire is for this study to shed some light on the often-perplexing situation in North Korea, offer some insight into the daily lives of ordinary North Koreans, and raise a profile of the human rights situation faced by North Koreans in their country and in China. We are happy that David Hawk is here with us today.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you.

Now, before I introduce David Hawk, our fellow Commissioner, Archbishop Chaput, could not be here, and so I'm going to make his comments for him. Lest you think that I'm trying to dominate, I'm going to make his comments for him.

I wanted to say that President Bush will be in South Korea this Thursday, and this latest round of the six-party talks ended last week. As the region's powers deal with North Korea's nuclear aspirations, the Commission believes that human rights objectives should not be put aside. There is testimony in this report to support efforts by the international community to address ongoing human rights abuses at the United Nations through the Special Rapporteur on North Korea and other multinational forums. There is a resolution on North Korea currently pending at the U.N. General Assembly.

But secondly, there is enough evidence in this report to show that North Koreans repatriated from China, particularly if it is discovered they are Christians or have had contact with South Koreans, are considered a danger to the government and can be jailed or even executed.

And so this is important information to offer the Chinese government and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. China considers all North Koreans to be economic migrants, a point repeatedly made to the Commission during its recent trip to China. However, it is a clear, settled matter of international law that even parties who leave their countries as economic migrants become refugees if they are subject to persecution when returned, a fate, without dispute, of North Korean refugees.

Third, this report shows the need for getting more information into North Korea. Those interviewed for this study admitted they had little knowledge of the outside world and what their government was telling the international community. The government's propaganda and the veneration of the Kims virtually squelched all outside information.

Fourth and finally, we think this report shows, again, the linkage between security and human rights, the same mistrust and the same paranoia over maintaining control that drives Kim to develop nuclear weapons also drives the regime to perpetuate egregious human rights violations that have plagued the North Korean people for the past half-century. And so the Commission has recommended that the six-party forum be used to reach agreement on human rights and human security issues beyond the nuclear issue. Using ongoing negotiations about security and normalized relations, the United States and its allies should set timetables and goals for North Korea to improve in such areas such as

monitoring of humanitarian aid, resettlement of refugees, family reunification, abductions, economic modernization, and other pressing human rights issues, including religious freedom, before it receives any economic assistance or diplomatic recognition.

Now, I want to introduce David Hawk to make some comments, and when he finishes we'll entertain your questions. David Hawk is a prominent human rights investigator and advocate. He's directed the Cambodian office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1996 to '97. In the early and mid-1980s, David Hawk investigated and analyzed the Khmer Rouge genocide in association with the Columbia University Center for the Study of Human Rights. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, David Hawk had established and directed a Cambodian documentation commission in New York City, which sought an international tribunal for the Khmer Rouge leadership, and human rights provisions and mechanisms for the 1991 Cambodian peace treaty and the U.N. transitional peacekeeping operation.

In August 1994, David traveled to Rwanda to investigate that country's massacres for the U.S. Committee for Refugees, and in 1995 he returned to Kigali on a mission for Amnesty International. A former executive director of Amnesty International's USA offices, he served on the board of directors of that organization and on the advisory board of Human Rights Watch Asia. And then in 2003, David Hawk researched and authored "Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps" - prisoner testimony and satellite photographs for the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

We're delighted that David Hawk is here today, and we're grateful for the important work he did on this study. David?

DAVID HAWK: The three core elements of the Human Rights Project are the elaboration and proclamation of the international norms and standards that set forth how states should treat their citizens; secondly, the documentation of human rights violations and abuses of those norms and standards; and thirdly, the seeking of refugees.

The norms and standards for the protection of freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and belief are set in the appendix, pages 116 to 124 of this report. The details of the violations of these norms and standards with respect to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief are spelled out throughout the report, throughout its hundred pages, but the gap between DPRK policy and practice and the international norms and standards of human rights - if you want a one-page look at the gap, it's on page 112 in the section on recommendations.

In 2002, the DPRK formally proclaimed to the U.N. Human Rights Committee that there is, in North Korea, respect for Article 18 of the International Covenants and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that there was freedom of religion in North Korea. This formal declaration was made on the basis of extremely constricted, circumscribed and controlled religious activity that affects one-fifth of 1 percent; that is 0.2 percent of the North Korean population engages in religious activity.

On the basis of the smallness - this is 40,000 people - and by way of contrast, half of the Koreans in South Korea are regarded as being religiously affiliated to Buddhism, to Protestantism, to Catholic Christianity, to Chondokyo, and to a welter of smaller religious sects worshipping Tangun, or something like the unification church, but nearly half of the citizens - half of the Koreans in South Korea are affiliated with one form of religious belief or another, and for North Korea the figure is 0.2 - one-fifth of 1 percent of the population. The U.N. Human Rights Committee found this so small, so unusual that they doubted that the standard set forth in Article 18 of the International Covenants or the Universal Declaration was being met, but the U.N. Human Rights Committee had not enough information, not enough detail about the actual situation with respect to freedom of thought, conscience and belief, to come to any firm conclusions or recommendations.

Similarly, if you look at the 2005 State Department report on religious freedom around the world, they note the lack of information, the lack of detail as to what the situation is. And as was mentioned, the Commission had a hearing on North Korea in Los Angeles more than a year ago and realized in the course of that hearing how little was known and how much more was known, and later had the idea that we should seek to find information where we can. And you cannot get this kind of information inside North Korea.

North Koreans don't allow people who want to ask these kinds of questions into the country or have these kinds of meetings or meet with North Koreans except with the presence of a government translator or minder.

So with the assistance of South Korean graduate students from Achun (sp) and Shandong University, we set up a project that conducted in-depth interviews with 40 North Koreans who had recently arrived in South Korea, having initially fled to China in the late 1990s or early years of the new millennium, and asked them to give us their perspectives and their experience, ask them the question, is there freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief? If so, explain; if not, why do you say that? Did they ever see or encounter or participate in any religious activity or see any places of worship or see any religious literature or ever meet or see any religious officials of any religion while they were in North Korea? We asked them, how did they know - what did they know about systems of thought and belief about various religions, and how did they know it, and inasmuch as Juche and Kim Il Sung thought is mentioned in the preamble to the DPRK constitution, we also asked these North Koreans how Juche - the Juche idea, how Kim Il Sung revolutionary thought was promulgated, and was it possible for North Koreans not to observe, not to follow the Juche idea and Kim Il Sung revolutionary thought?

Their answers are contained in Chapter 3 of this report. And their testimonies provide a strong and consistent baseline that presents a viewpoint that's at total variance, total contradiction with the formal, official proclamations of the DPRK to the United Nations. There were mostly average, normal North Koreans who were not part of the privileged elite who's allowed to live in or even visit Phnom Penh - sorry, Pyongyang. And most of the Koreans we interviewed - in fact, all of them - had never heard of Article 68 of the DPRK constitution, which deals with freedom of religion, and they had never been to Pyongyang and were unaware of the constricted controls and circumscribed religious activities that take place there and only there, where there are three churches, soon to be four, in the entire country located all and only in the capital city where there are foreign visitors.

To find out more information about the situation in Pyongyang, it was necessary to interview South Korean, European and North American religionists who have some dealings with their North Korean counterparts since the North Koreans we interviewed hadn't been allowed to ever visit Pyongyang. And the description of current policy and practice in the capital city is described in Chapter 8 of this report. And Chapters 5 and 6 describe how the regime got to the situation where it is today, where only 0.2 percent of the population of Koreans in the North have any affiliation with any system of thought or belief other than Kim Il Sungism. Those are described in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

Just to summarize briefly what it is that is found in the report, the gaps, there are people who continue to be imprisoned for their religious beliefs - quite a number of people who are punished because of their religious beliefs. Two of the 40 people interviewed for this report personally eye-witnessed executions of religious believers. Those executions took place in the late 1990s. There is always a lag of information between the time that people leave North Korea, the time they spend in China, the time it takes to go from China to South Korea, and until we meet them in South Korea where they're accessible to foreign journalists, scholars and human rights investigators, but executions, according to the people we interviewed for this survey, continued up through the late 1990s. We have no more recent information obtained from our own interviews.

It's also the case that there are religious believers who have been imprisoned in sections within some of the kwan-li-so political penal labor colonies for decades for their religious beliefs. It's also difficult, as described in the report, because of the structure of religious federations, it doesn't seem possible for religious or belief systems for which there is no federations - there are federations for Protestantism, for the 800 Catholics that North Korea says are in the country, for several thousand Buddhists, and for the Chondokyo beliefs, but it doesn't seem possible under the structure for religions other than those four to be observed at all, or any of the - as you know, in Protestant Christianity there are many different kinds of denominations or sects, orthodox and unorthodox. There aren't any of these additional denominations or approaches other than the officially recognized federation, and those federations - the federation which runs the three churches in Pyongyang are not allowed to have any education program such as Sunday schools. They're not allowed to have any religious literature or outreach, and they're not allowed to have any of the kind of youth programs that are associated with Protestant Christianity everywhere else in the world other than North Korea.

Lastly, just let me say a word about the remedy. For North Korea we're really not at that stage yet. We're still at the stage of trying to put the human rights situation in North Korea on the international agenda. We're making progress on that. You have the resolutions of the U.N. Human Rights Commission for the last two years. There is now, in front of the General Assembly, also introduced by the EU, a resolution at the General Assembly which would recognize the extreme violations in North Korea. You had the Human Rights Act passed by this Congress last year; you had, stemming from the action in the U.N., the appointment of the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in North Korea, Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn; you had the appointment of the Special Envoy, whom we hope to meet, Mr. Leftkowitz, in the next several days.

So we are making progress in getting it on the agenda, but it's not still on the agenda enough for any remedies to have begun. There are two principles in regards to remedies that are worth mentioning, the first of which is that if - however it happens, if North Korea wants to join the political economy of the New Millennium, if North Korea wants trade and investment and aid from the rest of the international community, then the rest of the international community can say to North Korea that it's got to make progress toward observing the international standards for human rights in the treatment of its principles.

And lastly, by way of remedy, I think it will be extremely important - in my own opinion, the most important element is for human rights to be put on the engagement agenda of South Koreans in their engagement policy with the North Koreans. Those are, I think, the two principles for remedy that I hope we can work for. For the rest of the details I'd refer you to the body of the report.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, David. Thank you. Well, we would like to entertain your questions, and I'm going to repeat your questions for the tape so we can transcribe what you ask. I don't see a hand yet so I get to ask the first question.

David, did you find out what they're being executed for? What is the charge when people are executed? We know they're being executed but is there a particular charge that they're being executed for?

MR. HAWK: Not seriously. There were not serious judicial processes for the people whose executions were witnessed, in this report, but frequently - and usually people are denounced as spies or traitors or traffickers is a common accusation, but these are not formal charges before a judge or in a court; these are announcements that are made at the public executions just before people are shot.

The lady here had a question.

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes? Yes, ma'am, did you have a question?
Yes? Oh, could you first of all say who you are and who you're with?

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes, the question was who are these .2 percent of people and why are they allowed to practice their religion? Is that right?

MR. HAWK: They are either people in their 70s or 80s who were religious believers prior to the Korean War, people who were brought up in either largely Buddhism or Chondokyo or Catholic or Protestant Christianity during the tail end of the 19th or beginning or middle of the 20th century when Chondokyo took hold and when Buddhism was allowed to revive. So these were pre-Korean War religious believers, and the children of some of these families who are now allowed to - if they - are now allowed to attend a home church or one of the three churches in the capital. But that's who they are.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you.

Yes, ma'am, in the back.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Mr. Hawk, are you confident that Mr. Bush will raise these questions when he is in Korea?

MR. HAWK: I have no idea one way or the other. I hope so but I have no idea what's in his agenda.

You can answer that on behalf of the Commission.

(Laughter.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Yeah, I'm fully confident the president will - no, I'm sorry; I'm just kidding. It's speculation, I mean, as to whether he'll do it or not.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes, well, I'll say, David, that we're certainly hopeful. This is something the president cares deeply about. A copy of this report has been sent to his staff and to the president. The senior administration officials have been briefed about our China report and also about this report. So this report is in the hands and this information is in the hands of administration officials. So we're hopeful that these issues will be brought to the attention of the president and then he will then in turn bring it to the attention of the people he meets with in Korea, both privately and publicly - hopeful.

MR. HAWK: And we are meeting tomorrow with Ambassador Lefkowitz.

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes. We're meeting tomorrow with Ambassador Lefkowitz, yes.

Preea (sp)?

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Preea, could you stand up so we could all hear you?

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Is there a functioning house-church movement in North Korea?

MR. HAWK: First off, there are things in North Korea translated variously as house churches or home worship centers, but it should not be equated with what are called home churches or house churches in China. The North Korean government claims that there are 500 - is it 12 - 512 or 517? - 512 home worship centers, or house-churches, and these are literally living rooms where people, maybe half a dozen people, who may in many instances be family members or people in a village, can meet and sing some hymns and recite some prayers. Persons interviewed for this report had attended eight of these home worship services. So we're not in a position to verify or corroborate the existence of 504 other ones. Those are the regimes figures. We can say people we've interviewed were familiar with eight of them, and at those eight, the participants were the same as with the three churches in Pyongyang - elderly people who came from pre-Korean War religious families.

We are not able to confirm any Buddhist meditation or worship at any of the 60 Buddhist temples that are preserved as cultural heritage sites. There are Buddhist temples but none of the people we've interviewed for this report were aware of any Buddhist meditation or religious observance taking place at those temples. So for the most part we cannot confirm. This is still things that we are struggling to find out more information about.

MR. CROMARTIE: I'll come to you. Let me go to this side.
Faith McDonnell.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Before I repeat the question, yes, you can have as many copies as you like. Just call the Commission and tell them how many you need.

The question was - I'll try to repeat it for the tape, which is that the head of the Episcopal Church recently said that much of what is being said about North Korea is false; that there is actually freedom in North Korea, and would this report shed any light on those kind of comments.

Is that a fair summary, Faith? I suspect it will.

MR. HAWK: I'll give you my card with my email address, and if you would be so kind as to provide me with the statement you've referred to - (chuckles) -

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. HAWK: Please, and I'd be happy to take that up with them directly.

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes, sir.

Q: (Off mike.) I would like to ask about your recommendations and then - according to the paper I got, you recommend that the North Korean human rights issue should be a separate agenda for the six-party talks, but to me it's not - I don't think it is realistic. But I would like to know is your position. Are you saying that the United States should not make any deal on the nuclear issue without improvement of the North Korean human rights situation?

And then one more, if I may. How do you evaluate the South Korean government's policy on the North Korean human rights issue? Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: The second question was how do we evaluate the South Korean government's policy toward North Korea. The first question was, if I understood, is there a linkage between human rights and the nuclear threat of North Korea, and what does Mr. Hawk or the Commission take on that - position we take on that?

David?

MR. HAWK: Your second question is clearly beyond the scope and purview and mandate of this report. I mean, I don't know the circumstances under which the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom would essentially take a position on the policy of a third party. I mean, the concern of the Commission is toward the religious freedom and freedom of thought, conscience and belief in North Korea, and wouldn't comment on South Korea's

policy anymore than on France or Germany or Guatemala or El Salvador's policy toward North Korea. It's the substance of the issue in North Korea that's the subject of the Commission's concern, as far as I know.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: How should who handle this? South Korea?

Q: I mean the six-party talks. The six-party talks is basically focusing on the North Korean nuclear issue -

MR. CROMARTIE: Okay, yeah.

Q: - but you said that that forum should be filled with human rights issues.

MR. CROMARTIE: Yes, the recommendation of the Commission is that human rights should be linked to all these other security questions, and that any discussion of the larger security issues should not ignore the human rights issues. That's the recommendation of the Commission.

David, do you want to -

MR. HAWK: Yeah, you know, after the fourth round of the six-party talks, the U.S. said that human rights, along with missile export and narcotics and counterfeiting were part of the discussion of North Korea with respect to normalization of relations, which was a separate discussion from the six-party talks on the nuclear proliferation question, which in turn is a separate discussion from the talks with the North Koreans on a peace treaty to replace the armistice to the Korean War. So the U.S., after the fourth round of the six-party talks, was talking about three different discussions and human rights was part of the discussion on normalization, okay?

Now, at the round just last week, the Chinese wanted to set up three different working parties: one on proliferation, one on political

normalization, and one economic assistance, but this was not accepted and we don't know where it will go next. There is an argument for trading security for security. The question is if it's not that kind of approach, if it turns into a comprehensive solution that includes all the economic development questions - the provision of aid, the ending of economic sanctions - then it's the position of the Commission that in that case, if it's a comprehensive solution that North Korea insists upon, then human rights issues ought to be part of any comprehensive approach.

Is that -

MR. CROMARTIE: That's very good, David. Thank you.

Before the next question I do want to announce that the Freedom House and the Center for Religious Freedom and the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom invite all of you tomorrow at 5:30 to 6:30 to attend a reception in honor of the new Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea, the Honorable Jay Lefkowitz. That will be tomorrow, November 16th, from 5:30 to 6:30 at the Senate Dirksen Building, Room SDG-50 - SDG-50 at 5:30 to 6:30. It will be a reception for the new Special Envoy for Human Rights. You are all invited.

We have time for one more question.

MR. HAWK: Take these two people in the press.

MR. CROMARTIE: Yeah, we have two more. Yes, go ahead. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, David.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Say it again, please.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Is there any underground church in North Korea where they can worship?

MR. HAWK: On the basis of the information obtained in preparing this report, we are unable to confirm or deny reports that there are large numbers of underground worshipers in North Korea. Most of the North Koreans - we interviewed two people who were part of this, but very, very briefly. Then they then thought it was totally unsafe and fled to China and to South Korea, which tells you something. And the others didn't believe that it was possible for there to be such a thing. They thought the police were in such control. But on the basis of the information we obtained in preparing this report, we cannot confirm or deny the existence of an underground church. We just simply didn't find out enough to say about it one way or the other.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you.

This gentleman was before you there. Yes, sir, and then the -

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Yeah, the question is, could you share with us some of the emotional aspects of the people you interviewed and what their reflections were?

MR. HAWK: Well, the North Koreans basically thought if you asked them if there is freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief in North Korea, they'd look at you like what are you talking about - (chuckles) - after it was translated to them. And they say, well, how could you - this is a crazy question. So they would be surprised that the question would even be asked, all right?

One of the executions that's described in the report - five people - two pastors, two assistant pastors and two deacons were executed, and they were given the opportunity to save their lives and recant their faith and promise to devote the rest of their lives to Kim Il Sung, in which case they would be spared execution. This was said to them just before - in the site of the execution, and the person we talked to, who was the witness - well, the five persons remained mute and were killed, and the person who was observing this, who described this to us, thought at the time that these people were crazy. Why should they lose their lives for their religious belief when it was easy for them to save their lives? So, I mean, that may not be the - so that's - the North Korean thought about it after a while and thought, oh, these people

have the courage of their convictions; they were willing to die for their beliefs. But at the time, as he's recounting the experience, he thought how odd it was that anyone would give their lives for their beliefs.

MR. CROMARTIE: We have to turn this room over to another group, but we have time for one quick, short question. Yes, sir. Yes, I'm pointing to you, sir.

Q: I just want to make a comment. My name is Shu No Kahn (ph). Last year - or this year I visited China and one missionary from a Western country told me that you would be surprised if you know how many underground worship places there are in North Korea.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, sir. The comment was, for the record, that we'd be surprised to know how many underground churches there are in North Korea. Thank you for that observation, sir. And thank you, David Hawk, for your hard work and for the work you've done on the study. If you all have friends who are members of the Episcopal Church who need copies of this book - I mean, of this report - (chuckles) - we're glad to get them to you.

Thank you, David, and thank you all for coming.

(END)