

# Norbert Vollertsen

"Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea": Dr. Norbert Vollertsen Oral Testimony

Jan. 24. 2002

DR. VOLLERTSEN: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you for the invitation. To start my comments, I'm still a friend of the North Korean ordinary people. I'm a German emergency doctor and I lived in North Korea for one and a half year, so I got a lot of experience. I managed to go throughout the whole country because I was a real emergency doctor. At that time I was the only doctor who took care for the victims of simple accidents for the patients in the hospitals for orphanages, 10 different hospitals, several orphanages all over the countryside and several hundred kindergartens all over North Korea.

I had a lot of access but this still increased when I gave my own skin to one of the North Korean citizens. He suffered from a skin burn and as a medical doctor I thought it's my duty to show that we want to engage, that we want to be friends, so I gave my own skin to show this and afterwards I got a great honor. There was a lot of public relations in North Korea and I was a real friend of the elite and I learned about the nice lifestyle of this elite.

I was shown around in all the facilities and all the hospitals. I took care for so many street victims, so many accidents, so whenever I entered the hospital nothing was arranged and I discovered the difference. Whenever there's an official visit from politicians from abroad everything is arranged. It's a showcase in North Korea. As a foreign visitor in North Korea you will never learn about the reality in North Korea because it's showcase. But when I visited those orphanages and the hospitals and the children's kindergartens I realized the reality and the reality is this, and afterwards we can see a little small videotape with these images of those children.

These are the children in North Korea. They are starving and they are in a desperate situation. Look at those eyes and then try not to care. Those children are dying. Then I wondered why there are so many orphans. Where are all the parents? What's going on here in this country? And I asked my translator, I asked all the people around me what happened but there was only silence. My main medical diagnosis in North Korea was that they're all afraid. They're full of fear. There is no real information.

I asked, "What happened to the parents? Accidents? Whatever? What happened?" Nobody wanted to tell me. Then I found the criminal law of North Korea and I discovered that there were so many persons detained because they violated Article 57 or 58 or 46 or Article 50, "A person who commits subversive acts against the state shall be committed to a reform institution for not less than five years," and I wondered about reform institutions. What is the meaning of "reform institution?"

Especially as a German I thought about those concentration camps in Germany and I wondered when this is the condition in a normal children's hospital, it's quite a luxury. Then I wondered about the condition in such a reform institution, so-called concentration camp, and I wanted to get the knowledge of what's going on in these reform institutions.

I think especially as a German I'm forced to get the knowledge of what's going on, even when there are only rumors or even when there are only some discussions about persecution, about mass execution, about killing, baby-killing, whatever, these are the rumors in North Korea but as a foreigner you are not allowed to go around and to prove it. So I argued with the officials and again I found a tortured soldier on the street. I argued with the officials. I was not any more a friend of the elite because the elite in North Korea enjoyed this lifestyle and I was very close to the elite because of my friendship medal and the high honor. This is the lifestyle of the elite and these are the starving children in the hospitals.

And those orphans, I found that mainly these children are children of Christians and I wondered what's going on with the Christians in North Korea. Then we were shown those churches in Pyongyang. It was also an official visit, an official invitation of some German politician and we found that there was never any official service. There was never any official ceremony. There was never any praying whatever. I lived there one and a half year. Nearly every Sunday I managed to go with my Jeep. Because of this high honor I got a private driving license and a special passport so I managed to go around all over the countryside and this so-called church in Pyongyang is also a showcase. There was never any activity. On Christmas Eve there was no activity, absolutely nothing.

And I spoke to my translators. I spoke to all those people. I managed to get closer to some North Korean students. I managed to get closer to some officials. There were never any Christian activities. So in the end I got a little rebellious and I argued with the government and after I found these tortured soldiers I argued with the government and in the end I was expelled. At the end of 2000 I was expelled and I fulfilled my promise. I directly moved to Seoul and there I met all those North Korean refugees and I spoke to them. And I wanted to get the reality so I went

to the Chinese-North Korean border in order to meet those people and now I'm publishing books about those interesting stories. I met those refugees there and they told me about the reality and the concentration camps, about the reality, about mass execution, about baby-killing, about anything you can't imagine.

So

I made several attempts, together with journalists, and that's my private approach in the future. I will go to the Chinese-North Korean border again in order to find out the reality because again as a foreigner in North Korea, even when you have such an access, you can't get the reality. You can't get the real picture behind. Therefore I'm going now around the world in order to speak out because I think it's my duty, my moral duty, to speak out.

You know about German history. We Germans were accused that we kept silent even when there were only some rumors about concentration camps. So nowadays there are some rumors about persecution of Christians in North Korea and some rumors about concentration camps. I think it's our duty to look if there is something real and to ask them, give the evidence. It's not our case to get the evidence. It's their case to show that we are not right and then I will apologize. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG:

Dr. Vollertsen, thank you very much. That's enormously compelling testimony. You do have a video which we'd very much like to see. What I'd like to do is listen to the testimony of our other two witnesses, we'll take some questions and then as we begin our break we will show the video for those who would like to see it. Again thank you very much. Your testimony is compelling.

I also just want to inform our audience Dr. Vollertsen spent considerable time with our staff chronicling these stories in much more detail and we are grateful for your willingness to share that with us, in light of the tremendous access that you've had. It's exactly this kind of information that needs to come out in the United States and in the West. Thank you.