

## Norbert Vollertsen - Prepared Testimony

"Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea": Norbert Vollertsen Prepared Testimony

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I was a member of a German medical group, Cap Anamur, and entered North Korea in July 1999 to carry out humanitarian medical assistance. I remained in North Korea for 18 month until I was expelled on Dec. 30, 2000 for publicly denouncing the regime for abusing basic human rights and for its failure to distribute the massive foreign food aid to the people who needed it most.

Early on during my stay I was summoned to treat a workman who had been badly burned by molten iron. My colleague at that time and I volunteered our own skin to be grafted onto this patient in order to show our friendship with the ordinary North Korean citizens. For this action we were nationally acclaimed by the media and awarded with the Friendship medal, the only two western foreigners ever to receive this high honor.

Together with this medal I was issued a somewhat VIP-passport and a driver's license, which allowed me to travel to many areas inaccessible to foreigners and to ordinary North Koreans citizens. I even secretly photographed my patients and their decrepit surroundings.

While acting as an Emergency doctor and looking for the victims of many accidents I also visited a number of other hospitals in other provinces beside the official ten hospitals and three orphanages I was assigned to. In order to deliver clothes to the North Korean children I also visited several dozens kindergartens all over the countryside.

In every hospital I visited I found unbelievable deprivation and I was shocked to see patients and orphans in these places. There were no bandages, no scalpels, no antibiotics, no operation facilities - only broken wooden beds supporting starving children waiting to die. In the hospitals the doctors were constantly using empty beer bottles as vessels for dripping, and safety razors as scalpels - there was even an appendectomy without any anesthesia. They insisted on the serious shortage of medical products and equipment while I found throughout my

"investigations" that there was a large stock of bandages and other medical goods in governmental storehouses and in diplomatic shops.

There are two worlds in North Korea. The world for the senior military, the members of the workers party and the country's elite where they are enjoying a nice lifestyle with fancy restaurants, diplomatic shops with European food, nightclubs and even an casino and the world for the ordinary people.

In the world for these ordinary people in a hospital one can see young children, all of them too small for their age, with hollow eyes and skin scratched tight across their faces, wearing blue-and-white-striped pajamas like the children in Auschwitz and Dachau in Hitler's Nazi-Germany.

Most of the patients in the hospitals suffer from psychosomatic illnesses, worn out by compulsory drills, the innumerable parades, the assemblies from 6:00 in the morning and the droning propaganda. They are tired and at the end of their tether. Clinical depression is rampant. Alcoholism is common because of mind numbing rigidities and hopelessness of life.

The patients in the North Korean hospitals are looking exhausted and fed up. The condition of the children was deplorable, emaciated, stunted, mute, emotionally depleted. Young adults have no hope, no future and anxiety is everywhere. One can only wonder why there are so many orphans.

Constraints and difficulties of operating in North Korea affect any accountable humanitarian aid assistance. There is no effective monitoring because there is no freedom of movement for the international humanitarian aid agencies. Nobody really knows where the food is going.

Before Cap Anamur came to North Korea other humanitarian agencies like MSF, OXFAM, ACF and CARE pulled out of North Korea, because they were not allowed to distribute the aid directly to the people. They had to turn it over to the government for the authorities to carry out the distribution and it is not possible to prove if a substantial portion of the foreign aid is going to the army or to those with status or sold to other countries. I myself did not witness any improvement in the availability of food and medicine or in the general living conditions during my whole staying.

Knowledge about the overall humanitarian situation in North Korea is also not available for the normal foreign visitor, aid worker or diplomat. Protection of the humanitarian interests of the population is not possible. General social and political rights, as basic rights grants to human beings in freedom of speech, the press, assembly, demonstration, ideology, religion and association are restricted in North Korea.

There is no activity in any of the churches in Pyongyang. It is a showcase for all the foreign visitors. When we were shown around the "priest" was only talking about the money-investment for the church, Kim Jung-Il and his goodwill towards the Christian community but there was no word about religion. And - what surprised us the most - when the priest talked about the open service in the church every Sunday morning we found all the seats in the church full of dust - never used in the last months, maybe years.... Also whenever I passed the church on a Sunday morning there was actually no activity - not even one of the 300 or 400 Christians the priest was talking about...

In North Korea the life of the workers has reached its limit, the life of the peasants is in a desperate condition too. The deprivation of the basic right to exist is obvious. The ordinary people are starving and dying. Violation of the freedom of personal inviolability and conscience by unwarranted arrest and detention is common and one can only imagine what the conditions are like in the so-called "reform institutions", where entire families are imprisoned when any member does or says something that offends the regime. These camps are closed to all foreigners; even the International Federation of the Red Cross has been denied access.

In the last Stalinist country on earth sexual violence against women, used like modern "comfort women", forced labor and torture is an important mean for maintaining the suppression of any opposition. A repressive apparatus is acting whenever there is any criticism and the constriction of human rights by intelligence surveillance, shadowing, wiretapping and mail interception is enormous. The oppressive nature of the police forces is evident and obvious at every street corner.

If the main medical diagnosis in North Korea is fear and depression because of man-made policy and not because of "natural disasters" one has to think about the right therapy and to speak out publicly about repression and human right abuses.

I realized that the only way to rescue people in North Korea in poverty and difficulty is to let the world know the real state of this country. So according to my extended possibilities with the friendship

medal I guided around Pyongyang a group of journalists accompanying Mrs. Albright, the then U.S. Secretary of State who visited North Korea in the autumn of 2000.

In addition, I spoke to every diplomat and after I found an obviously tortured soldier I handed over a statement of humanitarian principles to the North Korean government.

This offended the leaders of the workers party and I was forbidden to go to the hospitals anymore, my car was sabotaged and finally I was forced to leave the country. As promised to the North Korean authorities I went directly to Seoul instead of going home to Germany and spoke to the International journalists there. In the following months I also interviewed several hundreds North Korean defectors in Seoul, at the Chinese-North Korean border and in several other places where they are hiding themselves in order to learn more about the cruel reality in their home country.

All the former prisoners of the concentration camps were talking about mass-execution, torture, rape, murder and other crimes against humanity because they were simply punished because of spreading the gospel and reading the bible.... (Look at the written testimonies...)

Working closely with the media the international community has to put pressure on the North Korean regime to open up toward the outside world and save the ordinary citizens lives. To improve human rights in North Korea the world has to speak out against the current regime.

Japan and the international community including China and Russia shall also intensify pressure on the South Korean government in their common attempt to eradicate state sponsored terrorism in order to let Hwang Jang-Yop, the highest North Korean defector ever, testify in front of the U.S. Senate about North Korea's connection to international terrorism, biochemical weapons and nuclear material.

The regime of Kim Jong-Il is committing crimes against humanity; they are using food as a weapon against their own people. Kim Jong-Il is responsible for genocide, North Korea is a real terror state with terror against his own people and therefore the leadership of this country has to face the International Criminal Court in The Hague like Mr. Milosevic and all the other dictators on earth.

As a German born after the war I know too well the guilt of my grandparents' generation for remaining silent while the Nazis were committing indescribable crimes. I felt it my duty as a human being, particularly as a German to expose the crimes and tyranny of the North Korean regime. My children should not have to ask me 'Pa, why did you get the knowledge and why didn't you act?'

I am dreaming about a free society in North Korea and healthy living conditions without fear for their nice innocent people and a North Korean nation that will be no more danger to their neighbor countries and therefore after visiting the United States, Japan and Europe I will subsequently continue all over the world for the express purpose of exposing the tyranny and criminality of this secret state, with the hope that international pressure will be applied by the world community to bring about a reformation of this depraved "mad place".

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