

Sang-Chul Kim

"Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea": Dr. Sam-Chul Kim Oral Testimony

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CHAIRMAN YOUNG:

Our next panelist is Dr. Sang-Chul Kim, who is Secretary General of the Commission to Help North Korean Refugees and also president of the Pacific Asia Society. Dr. Kim, whom I had the opportunity of meeting in Seoul, is a former mayor of Seoul and heads a South Korean organization that is serving the needs of North Korean refugees. In that capacity he gave me the opportunity to speak with some North Korean refugees, at least one of whom I believe he has brought with him, as well, today. So again during the break those who would like to speak with him, he's also available. Dr. Kim?

STATEMENT OF SANG-CHUL KIM

DR. KIM:

Thank you, Chairman. I think today is a very historical and inspiring day for the Christians underground in North Korea or hiding in China. I have been invited six years ago to make a briefing at the House Subcommittee on Human Rights on the human rights situation in Korea. I'm very sorry that it not much changed from that time six years ago now.

I must pay deepest respect to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom because of hosting this significant hearing on the human rights and religious freedom situation in North Korea.

Let me shortly introduce my organization named the Commission to Help North Korean Refugees. It has an affiliation to the Christian Council of Korea and petitions to the United States to protect North Korean refugees as refugees in the meaning of the 1951 Convention on Refugees. 11.8 million citizens have signed the petition from 21 countries of the world and we are making investigation and field survey. For example, in December 1999 we have made the field survey report interviewed by 2,193 North Korean refugees in China who are living there in poverty and in constant fear of being arrested and to be repatriated to North Korea. The number estimated at that time

about 100,000, probably now reduced a little from that, so I guess the number about 50,000 North Korean refugees now.

From 1953 the

North Korean Labor Party has deprived of the people all the religious freedom. Therefore it is reported that 200,000 Christians and Buddhists have been arrested and to be sent to some forced labor facilities or et cetera. Here I have a North Korean refugee, a first lieutenant who has defected North Korea in 1993 named Mr. Lim Young-Sun. May I introduce Lim Young-Sun to you? Mr. Lim Young-Sun. He has seen in 1980, as he was under the training for the soldiers in Taehwado Island near from Pyongyang North Province. He has seen at that time 50 to 60 very weak and old but very bright-facing workers who have been explained by the regimental commander at that time that they were the Christians remaining from 2,000 Christians who have been sent to the island, at that time uninhabited island at that time, and the rest, all the rest have been died from the hard work and starvation.

The 50 to

60 people are the remnants, Christians, from the persecution of North Korean Labor Party. They all have been removed after several months to other political prisoner camp later named Number 18 Camp. I should say now about the Ten Fundamental Principles of Juche Ideology. These Ten Principles are not constitution itself but the effecting power is more stronger than the constitution. According to these Ten Fundamental Principles, Kim Il-Sung is subscribed as a god itself. So in North Korea no religion except Kim Il-Sung's god.

So

all the religion is forbidden very strictly. The constitution says about the freedom of religion but because the Ten Fundamental Principles more stronger, more powerful than the constitution, all the religion is strictly forbidden. Therefore, when we find that no religion is allowed in North Korea we are not surprised.

This

is the children literature magazine of North Korea of July 1999. In this magazine it is explained that the American Christian missionary is a vampire who sucks the blood of the human being. There are several churches, two Protestant churches and one Catholic Church, in Pyongyang but it is really a political function place. It is off-limits to the ordinary people.

Very

recently, last year, the delegation of Presbyterian Church of Korea has visited Pyongyang and one of the delegation members has said the chairman of North Korean Christian Council, Christian Federation, named Kang Young-Seop, has said, pointing the drawing of Kim Il-Sung on the badge on his jacket, he said that this is what we really believe in.

The Pongsu Church and Chilgol Church is a facility for the exchange with South Korean churches but why are you concerned about the underground church members?

There are many cases of the persecution to North Korean refugees who have become Christians through the Christian mission in northeast part of China. Many cases of persecution are reported. I have here five statements written by the North Korean refugees who are witnessing about the persecution to the North Korean refugees.

In conclusion, I'd like to emphasize two things. One, we must differentiate the official Christian organization and their offices who are related tightly with the Labor Party and the underground Christians, who are hiding. When one is found to be a Christian they will meet the severe danger of being executed or being sent to political prison camp where no one come outside not died.

And the second thing, the humanitarian aid to North Korea is made mostly by religious groups but not with the name of the religious group. When the humanitarian aid will be made with the name of the organizations which has given the aid, then I think it will be very effective for the North Korean people to know the positive function of a religion, to make the power elite of North Korea to know the real meaning of religion.

And I think North Korean refugees are the real people who want to have the religious freedom. So when we support the religious freedom of North Korean people then I think we will strongly support, we should strongly support the North Korean refugees who are hiding in northeast part of China. So respected commissioners, I urge you to protect the North Korean refugees without any right to leave. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG:

Dr. Kim, thank you very much. We will be delighted to read those additional reports that you brought with you from refugees. And, as I mentioned before, we're happy to take a longer statement into the record. Thank you very much for your presence here today.