

## Sang-Chul Kim - Prepared Testimony

"Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea": Dr. Sang-Chul Kim Prepared Testimony

Jan. 24. 2002

### Preface

Honorable Chairman, and Commissioners, I am honored and pleased to be invited here to testify on the religious freedom in North Korea.

In December 1995, I was invited to give a briefing at the U.S. House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights on the human rights situation in Korea, Which is recorded in Congressional Record Vol.142 No.116-Part? of August 2,1996

The following is included in my briefing;

The death of Kim Il-Sung did not change anything in North Korea. North Korea continues to be a closed society, isolated from the international community. North Korea maintains the same dictatorial communist regime under the same 'Juche'(or Chuche) ideology and the obsessive cult of personality. Politically, the North Korean people are living in an extensive gulag. Economically, they are plagued by low productivity, a shortage of food, a shortage of energy and foreign currency. While having to tighten its closed-door policy to maintain the present political structure, its economic problems can not be solved without opening its doors, structural adjustment, and economic reform. In addition, the complete blockade of information and criticism is destroying any human rights initiatives in North Korea.

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There are 42,000 churches with 10million Protestant Christians and 3 million Catholics in the South but in the North, only 2 Protestant

churches and 1 Catholic church exist and these are for exhibition purposes.

...

As you all know there have been innumerable cases of human rights violations in North Korea. Any diplomatic relationship with North Korea and any promise for economic aid would mean extending support to a violent and inhumane regime which has no respect for human rights. If we are to avoid the inadvertent support for a dictatorial regime, we should be alert. Improvement of the human rights situation in North Korea has to be a prerequisite to the normalization of diplomatic relations. Such improvements must include freedom of religion and communication among the separated families.

I am very sorry that religious freedom conditions in North Korea have not changed much from that time conditions in my briefing six years ago.

#### The Christian Remnants after Deprivation of Religious Freedom in North Korea

The Labor Party of North Korea (DPRK) expelled all religious people from the society starting at the end of the Korean War in 1953. In other words, citizens born after 1954 have never had access to any religion. Until 1970, it has been known that approximately 200,000 Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, members of other religions, whom the Labor Party branded as anti-revolutionary and anti-Labor Party, have been arrested and tens of thousands of those who would not give up their beliefs, including 5,000 dedicated Christians, were conscripted into forced labor to build underground military facilities or to work in logging areas in Siberia, until they were literally worked to death in virtual slave-like conditions.

The existence of such measures, meant to obliterate Christians from the earth, was part of the testimony of Lim Young-Sun, who defected to South Korea in 1993, and now at this hearing along with me. A former first -lieutenant in the North Korean Army, he had received military training at Taehwado Island, North Pyongan province in August, 1980. He has seen there around 50 to 60 weak and old, but clean and bright facing workers, who were, according to the speech made by the regimental commander, Christians just as bad anti-revolutionaries, remaining from the 2,000 Christians including ministers taken to that time uninhibited island in 1950s for forced labor to construct an huge underground military base. Most of them died from hard work and starvation except for that 50 to 60 people who were later transferred to a camp for political prisoners which was later named Camp 18.

The North Korean Labor Party transformed Kim Il Sung into god

In 1974, Kim Jong Il proclaimed "The Ten Fundamental Principles concerning the Solid Establishment of the 'Chuche' Ideology of the Party" which effectively declared Kim Il-Sung to god-like status. Anyone who denied or thought lightly of it was taken to political prison camp with no exit other than death. Kim Jong Il put the Ten Principles above the Constitution and used it as a tool for deification of Kim Il Sung and himself.

The Ten Fundamental Principles concerning the solid Establishment of the 'Chuche' Ideology of the Party:

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Under the revolutionary philosophy of Comrade Kim Il Sung, the whole country should be united as one

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Comrade Kim Il Sung shall be given supreme respect with loyalty.

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The authority of Comrade Kim Il Sung is absolute.

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The instructions of Comrade Kim Il Sung should be treated as a creed.

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In carrying out the instructions of Kim Il Sung unconditional obedience should be the principle

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Centering on Comrade Kim Il Sung, philosophical unification and unity of the Party must be strengthened.

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Everyone should be under the tutelage of the teachings of Comrade Kim Il Sung, and wholly adopt his form of communism and revolution.

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Everyone must endeavor to requite Comrade Kim Il Sung's great trust and consideration with heartfelt loyalty.

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Under the sole leadership of Comrade Kim Il Sung a strong organization order must be set up under which the party, nation, and military move as one.

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The great achievements of Comrade Kim Il Sung shall be passed down to future generations and be recognized as perfect.

Although the principles listed above may appear as general governing ideas, a close look reveals that Kim Il Sung is described as god. Given that those principles are in force in North Korea, it should come as no surprise that all other religions are strictly forbidden within the borders of North Korea. There are many testimonies that an estimated 200,000 people are detained in the political prison camps scattered throughout North Korea. These prisoners are principally those who either resisted or violated the 10 Principles. In the final analysis, they refused to give worship to Kim Il Sung as god.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find a textbook for children in North Korea which subscribes an American Christian missionary as a vampire sucking the blood of human beings. (the drawing attached).

## Worship Service as Political Function at Official Church

In reality, no religion except "Chuche" (the self-reliance pronouncements of Kim Il-sung) ideology officially exists in North Korea.

After visiting North Korea, members of religious groups have often returned with information that, although limited in numbers, some North Koreans exercise their religious belief in God. In fact, it must be pointed out that all of the scenes they saw was performed by North Korean authorities.

In 1987 the North Korean Labor Party allowed several churches, namely the Chilgol Church, Pongsu Church, and the Changchun Catholic Church, to be built with strong financial assistance from the South Korean churches. The project was part of the 1989 Pyong-Yang World Socialists Youth Festival, which North Korea organized as a way to compete with the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. A Buddhist temple on Mt. Taesongsan near Pyongyang, maintained before only as a cultural heritage, was opened as well.

Such projects did not signal the restoration of religion in North Korea, however. Rather, these projects were allowed only as a formality to make places of worship available for the people who would visit North Korea during the World Youth Festival. In fact, the nature of services that religious visitors to North Korea attend at churches or the Buddhist temple can better be described as political rallies or events rather than religious worships.

The Official religious organizations of North Korea, including The Christian Federation of Korea, The Buddhism Committee of Korea, and Youth Party of 'Chondo-ism'(a religion founded in Korea by Choe Che-Wu in 1859) belong to the Unification Front Department of the Labor Party of DPRK, and are used as facades to portray to the world that religious freedom is practiced in North Korea.

In 1988, the Changchun Catholic Church was built in the capital of Pyongyang City, near the Taedonggang River facing the military unit where Lim Young-Sun, who later fled North Korea, carried out his military service. According to his witness, the North Korean authority classified the Catholic Church as a political function area, and made it off-limits to ordinary people. The Catholic Church had no regular celebration of the Mass. Instead, so-called worshipers were selected and trained to go through the motions of religious worship, and in so doing, were knowingly participating in a 'political function' under the

guise of a worship service.

According to a delegation member of the Presbyterian Church of Korea(south) to the Christian Federation of Korea(north), who visited Pyongyang in early July, 2001, Rev. Kang Young-Seop, chairman of the north Korean organization pointed to the Kim Il-Sung's drawing in the badge on his jacket collar saying that "This is what we really believe in! We have built Pongsu Church and Chilgol Church for the exchange with the churches in South Korea and the world. And why are you concerned about the so-called underground church members in North Korea?".

### Cruel Persecution of Christian Defectors

The Commission to Help North Korean Refugees(CNKR), a private commission affiliated to the Christian Council of Korea, has submitted a petition to the UN signed by 11,800,495 people from 21 countries on May 16, 2001, urging the UN to act swiftly to protect North Koreans mainly in China, who have fled repression at home and to grant them refugee status according to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

More than one hundred thousand North Koreans have fled their country and continue to do so because of starvation and political oppression. Most of these refugees are scattered and live under miserable conditions in neighboring countries constantly facing the threat and fear of coercive repatriation. They live in abject poverty, without any right to live. If they are caught and forcibly repatriated to North Korea, they will be tortured, sent to labor camps or executed.

Nowadays Christian mission is widely made mostly by volunteer missionaries to the North Koreans who cross the border of China for food and in some cases return to North Korea. Therefore, officials ferret out such North Koreans who came back or deported to North Korea. Anyone found to be a Christian is either summarily executed or sent to completely controlled political prison camps from which no one is expected to come out alive.

Mr. Chang Hae-Chan is a pseudonym. His real name and the organization he worked for will not be revealed in order to protect his family in North Korea. Chang worked as a manager for a law-related organization. He witnessed that in 1999 Kim Jong-Il issued an order to the effect that, "Christianity is seeping in from China. Either I will give up my place or liquidate Christianity."

His written statement says the following. Han Yeong-Su (35) and Park Jin-Suk (31) are a married couple who fled into China and came back to their home town. The political security police had a suspicion that they are secretly practicing new religion. A spy was sent, who arranged for the couple to go to China again. The spy monitored Han and Park attending church services in Yanbian, ethnic Korean area of China. The couple later headed home to North Korea, not knowing they were bound for a well-prepared trap. Security officials who lay in wait for them put them under arrest in August of 1998. Sensing the grave danger that had suddenly befallen them, they reacted as many Christians would and began to pray to God. One of the security policemen struck them violently with the butt of his rifle. He and others proceeded to pound on them ruthlessly and broke their teeth, arms and legs. In April of 1999, without a trial, Han and Park were sentenced to 18 years and 15 years of incarceration in political prison camp. Sentences given to Christians by the North Korean regime are a mere deception. In reality, they will die in prison camp. The North Korean regime knows that Christians rarely abandon their faith even in the face of persecution.

According to recently published 'Catacomb Connection' (a monthly journal of a Korean Christian mission group) of January 2002, a 17 years old North Korean youth, who has become Christian in Yanbian area and returned to his home town engaging in mission work to youngsters in the marketplace, has been arrested to be executed in secret on November 2001. His determination not to change his belief at the moment of being executed has moved one of the officials so strongly that he has come to believe in God, so reported by another North Korean Christian who knew the executed and made survey around him.

Another defector, Chu Mi-Kyeong, 24, a Hyesan Public Elementary School teacher defected to China in May of 1998 with her two sisters. She was kidnapped in Harbin, China, by North Korean Overseas Security personnel and sent back to North Korea. According to her statement, security agents interrogated about 50 defectors and through a series of deliberately manipulative questions, ferreted out those who had come in contact with Christianity in China. Since that interrogation, the whereabouts of all the ferreted remain unknown.

It has been reported that North Korean security personnel kidnapped Rev. Kim Tong-Sik in February of 2000. Rev. Kim holds permanent residence in the U.S. and preached the Gospel and cared for starving North Korean refugees. North Korean security agents stationed in China kept a close watch on Rev. Kim's activities. On February 16, 2000, he was kidnapped and forcibly transported across the Chinese/North Korean border to North Korea. According to a reliable source, Reverend Kim has been said have appeared occasionally at the Pongsu Church.

## Suggestions

1. North Korea's religious oppression is kept completely hidden from

international scrutiny.

Therefore, it is often difficult to secure comprehensive evidence. For this reason, some religious organizations, and much of the international community have been deceived by North Korea's manipulative policies.

Given this, I believe that Mr. Hwang Jang-Yeop, the highest-ranking defector to Korea who served as the Secretary of Ideology for North Korea Labor Party, is the first witness to testify accurately and comprehensively regarding the inner workings and actual governing principles of the ruling elite of North Korea. His testimony would be very informative.

2. Humanitarian aid to North Korea should be made more efficiently through religious groups. Such action will help demonstrate to the North Korean government and its people the goodwill and positive intentions of religious people.

Presently, an enormous amount of humanitarian aid is donated to North Korea by religious groups, however, relief goods are being delivered without in the name of the Red Cross. As a result, instead of recognizing and being grateful to religious people for their support and assistance, North Korea has intensified its persecution of Christianity. If relief aid is delivered by religious groups, it will have a beneficial influence on the attitude of high ranking officials and the people toward religion.

3. Christian groups need to be differentiated between the North Korean Christian correlations that are influenced by the government versus the Christian groups that have gone underground. When we say about the religious freedom, we should pay attention to the underground religious believers rather than the high-ranking elites in religious organizations and the well-trained religious functions participants.

The North Korean people who are in need of religious freedom the most are those who escaped the totalitarian North Korean regime to China, but have no immigration status in China. These North Koreans in China need to be elevated to the status of refugee so that they can be provided their basic human rights. We will find the way, if we search earnestly.