

## June 12, 2008: USCIRF Delegation Travels to South Korea, Releases Korean-language Report on Religious Freedom Conditions in North Korea

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WASHINGTON--The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom will travel to South Korea this week to release the Korean-language version of its latest report on religious freedom and related human rights in North Korea, entitled *A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea*. The Commission will also confer with government officials, academics, religious leaders, and former North Korean refugees to discuss current human rights conditions in North Korea and ways to address human rights and humanitarian and refugee issues there. The Commission, a bipartisan, independent federal body is mandated by the U.S. Congress to monitor abuse of freedom of religion or belief and related human rights around the world and to make recommendations to the President, State Department, and Congress on ways to address international religious freedom concerns.

The report offers new evidence that the North Korean government, through both its border patrols and security agencies, is seeking to halt the growth of religious activity and views religious activity as a security threat. North Korean refugees repatriated from China are interrogated about their religious affiliation and associations while in China. Refugees are mistreated and tortured in detention by border guards. In addition, North Korean security agents receive religious training in order to infiltrate Korean-Chinese churches and set up mock "prayer meetings" to entrap new converts, particularly those who have become Protestants while in China. Despite efforts to curtail all religious activity, the report shows that clandestine religious activity does exist in North Korea, including Buddhism, Christianity, and Shamanism. The situation for North Korean refugees in China and the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees by the Chinese government is of particular concern to the Commission.

A Prison Without Bars is an update to the Commission's first study on North Korea utilizing interviews with North Korea refugees living in South Korea, "Thank You Father Kim Il Sung": Eyewitness Testimonies to Severe Violations of the Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in North Korea.

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