



## North Korean Human Rights Situation

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It's an honor to be here at the Bangkok International Conference on the North Korean Human Rights Situation. I would like to thank all of those who have made this conference possible. We are here to discuss and draw attention to an issue of great international and moral importance—the plight of the North Korean people, and steps that those of us in the free world can take to aid them, and in so doing, further the cause of peace and security in northeast Asia.

It's fitting that we have chosen these particular days to talk about human freedom. Later this week, America will mark the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, which led ultimately to the end of slavery in the U.S. It was the culmination of an abolitionist movement that dated back a century to before America's founding. It reminds us that great moral challenges can take time, but ultimately causes that may appear hopeless or indefinite can be achieved.

I am pleased to be here among those of you who have committed so much time and effort to this cause. I appreciate the chance to talk to you as a representative of the U.S. Government, on behalf of Jay Lefkowitz, who is President Bush's Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea. The Special Envoy sends his greetings and regrets that his schedule did not permit him to be here in person.

### I. Guiding Principles

President Bush has made clear the U.S. government's guiding principle on North Korean human rights. Earlier this month, speaking at the APEC summit in Sydney, he said "We must work for the day when the people of North Korea enjoy the same freedoms as the citizens of their democratic neighbors."

This was an extension of a policy the President laid out in his second inaugural address, in which he said: "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture..."

We do this not only for reasons of conscience, but also because we see it as a compelling national interest. Earlier this year at the Henry Jackson Society in London, Special Envoy Lefkowitz explained why. He said: "The North Korean regime does not only endanger its own people through its barbaric actions. A nation that does not respect the rights of its citizens is almost invariably a nation that will not respect the rights of its neighbors. Dictatorships almost always threaten regional and even global peace. This is true for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that authoritarian rulers often need to create enemies simply to justify their repression. That is why human rights is not just an end in itself, but a vital objective of our foreign policy."

As we have already heard from a number of speakers, North Korea exhibits some of the most egregious and infamous human rights abuses known to man. U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos summed up the human rights situation as the U.S. House of Representatives debated the North Korean Human Rights Act. He said: "The political system itself is Stalinist to the core. No elections. No freedom of the press. No freedom of assembly. No words of dissent. No criticism of the government or of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il."

Special Envoy Lefkowitz has noted the existence of a large network of political concentration camps in North Korea. We believe these camps hold from 150,000 to 200,000 North Korean citizens. The network is vast, and can be seen easily on commercial satellite photos. Videos and images of various camps have been smuggled out of North Korea and appear on web sites like YouTube. These combined with accounts of life in the camps like the book *Aquariums of Pyongyang*, by Kang Chol-Hwan, who spent a decade in one, paint a terrifying and grim picture.

Added to this is yet another serious affront to human rights. North Korea has yet to account fully for the foreign citizens it has abducted.

### II. Our Approach

As we can see, action is clearly necessary. The history of recent advances in human rights and democracy shows that change in a nation must come from within, but it can be assisted by strong international pressure. Along with the principles I spoke of earlier, this notion has guided us in devising our operational approach to support the aspirations of freedom of the North Korean people.

Our approach has three major components:

- Building an international consensus for action against human rights abuses committed against North Koreans;
- Encouraging reform in North Korea, which over time will lead to respect for fundamental human rights; and
- Welcoming North Korean refugees to the U.S. and seeking the humane treatment of refugees still in harm's way.

In seeking to build an international consensus, the Special Envoy and other officials have spoken frequently in public about North Korean human rights and met privately with dozens of governments and non-governmental groups to raise awareness. We have worked through international forums like the United Nations to build pressure for change. Last October, the UN General Assembly's human rights committee passed a resolution on North Korean abuses. We were happy to see South Korea vote in favor of the resolution—Special Envoy Lefkowitz had lobbied them repeatedly to do so. The European parliament passed a similar resolution. We will work to ensure this trend continues in the UN and other international venues.

The perilous condition of the thousands of North Korean refugees in hiding in China and elsewhere in East Asia is of great concern to us. We have made it clear that the Chinese government's uniform classification of these individuals as "illegal economic migrants" is a position the U.S. does not accept, given the well founded fear of persecution these North Koreans have if they are forcibly repatriated. We continue to press China to treat these refugees humanely and in a manner consistent with the UN refugee protocol China signed. We have also sought the humane treatment of North Korean refugees elsewhere in East Asia. When we become aware of specific refugees in danger, we intervene with the appropriate officials and seek the safety and humane treatment of the refugees.

The third leg of our strategy is to take steps that will aid North Koreans in seeking reform within their country. Funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress have supported non-governmental organizations to conduct research on the human rights situation in North Korea, and build networks among those who might help bring about peaceful change. However, given the closed nature of North Korea, there are limited options for directly promoting respect for human rights there.

One viable option, however, is to increase the flow of accurate information going into North Korea, which has been a priority for us. The regime attempts to control all information in the country, and to convince people that they live in a socialist paradise while the world outside is hostile and barbaric. Defectors have told us how

receiving factual information from abroad stirred in them an awakening that the propaganda was not true. Through enhanced radio broadcasting and other forms of information dissemination, a number of groups are seeking to circumvent the blockade on information that the government has imposed on its people. We wholeheartedly support these 'journalists with a cause.' It should also be noted that broadcasting is one method to reach abductees in North Korea-to sustain their hope and let them know they are not forgotten.

### III. Role of Information

In my limited remaining time, I would like to speak more about this effort, because it is one we believe has the greatest likelihood of encouraging reform over time. Free information reaching people living under repressive government can have an effect at both the individual and mass level. We saw this at work behind the Iron Curtain when dissidents began to confront totalitarianism in Europe and two examples are worth noting.

On an individual level, there is the case of Vasili Mitrohkin, who worked for the KGB in the Soviet Union. His particular transformation occurred when as he began to learn the true circumstances of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 that crushed the Prague Spring. According to a book he wrote with Christopher Andrew, Mitrohkin listened to broadcasts from the free world, and despite concerted Soviet jamming that made frequent radio adjustments necessary, he was able to receive news stories and fragments. He also read works of the Samizdat-or underground press. Thanks to these, he was able to conclude: "I was a loner, but I now knew that I was not alone."

Mitrohkin ceased to be a willing part of the apparatus of oppression. He was moved out of the field to a desk job, and over the next two decades secretly copied major portions of the KGB's archives before fleeing with that catalog of horrors to the West. This is the sort of individual awakening that free information can cause.

A closer look at the Prague Spring and the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that awoke Mitrohkin provides us with a lesson on the power of independent and factual information on a larger, mass basis. What was attempted in Czechoslovakia that year was a peaceful effort to transform into "Socialism with a human face," as the reformist government called it. The transformation was successful domestically, but was suppressed by a Soviet-orchestrated military invasion. This is an interesting analogy, because were this type of peaceful evolution to occur in North Korea, there would be no foreign intervention to halt it-indeed it undoubtedly would be welcomed by the world.

As it turns out, free information helped spark that evolution in 1968, and sustain it up to the point that it was crushed by Soviet intervention. A "writers' revolt" helped lead to the elevation of the reformist government. According the book *Prague's 200 Days* by Harry Schwartz, the outgoing government controlled all of the domestic media, but dissident writings were smuggled out and broadcast back into Czechoslovakia on BBC, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Free information played a powerful, transformative and peaceful role.

After discussing the effect of broadcasting, Schwartz summed up: "it was much more difficult for the propaganda chiefs to justify the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia than the 1956 invasion of Hungary. Their audiences in 1968 were far better educated, much more sophisticated, and more acquainted with foreign countries through personal travel than were the 1956 audiences, composed of masses still emerging from the intellectual anesthesia of the Stalin period."

This is crux of what broadcasting and other forms of disseminating factual information can do. I have used Cold War analogies, but independent broadcasting has also played an important role in other human rights movements in Burma, South Africa and Latin American countries, to cite some examples. As the Book of John says: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Indeed, we already have indications that independent information sent into North Korea is reaching people and having an effect.

The U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees broadcasts like Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, has commissioned studies by InterMedia to assess the effects of external broadcasting on North Korea. They interviewed defectors and have found that almost half of recent survey respondents have listened to foreign radio inside North Korea, despite the risk of punishment. The survey also found that more than one-third of respondents had modified their fixed-channel radios to receive foreign broadcasts. While this sample of defectors is probably not representative of the whole North Korean public, this nonetheless indicates that there is a strong and healthy demand inside North Korea for news and information from abroad.

The Special Envoy has worked with the Broadcasting Board of Governors to increase the duration and transmission quality of Korean broadcasts. We have also sought to obtain resources for the growing number of independent groups that transmit information. We have asked Australia to consider adding a Korean service to Radio Australia, and for the British to do the same with the BBC. We were pleased that the government of Japan began supporting a one-hour radio broadcast this year, and hope to see that effort expand and broaden in the future.

### IV. Conclusion

The task we have before us is as challenging as it is noble. It is heartening to come to gatherings such as this and see that a growing number of people are focused on North Korea. The work you do is important for the sake of a long suffering people and also for peace and security. As long as a government is willing to trample the most basic rights of its citizens, it is unlikely to respect the rights of its neighbors. We will continue to work for the day that North Koreans are free. That is our policy. As President Bush said in Prague this June: "People living in tyranny need to know they are not forgotten. North Koreans live in a closed society where dissent is brutally suppressed, and they are cut off from their brothers and sisters to the south... My message to all those who suffer under tyranny is this: we will never excuse your oppressors. We will always stand for your freedom."

