

United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review, 6th Session
Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Stakeholder Submission
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

INTRODUCTION

1. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a human rights organisation specialising in religious freedom, wishes to draw the attention of the OHCHR to the egregious human rights violations which have and continue to take place in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).
2. The country’s closed-border policy ensures a challenge in obtaining exact figures. Nevertheless, research gained through first-hand witness testimonies and consultations with South Korean academics and agencies on the field has led us to the conclusion that there is a *prima facie* case for the commission of crimes against humanity, as well as indicators of genocide¹. The strict hierarchical system of government and the information available about decision-making in the DPRK suggests that the political leadership, and in particular Kim Jong-Il, is to be held responsible.
3. In light of the DPRK’s obligations under international law to respect human rights, this submission focuses on the limits to freedoms enshrined in the constitutional and legislative framework, and reviews the protection and promotion of human rights on the ground. Particular attention is given to the detention and imprisonment system, the state apparatus which permits the deprivation of numerous human rights.

BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

Scope of International Obligations

4. The DPRK Government is obliged to put into practice the obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as later mentioned.
5. **Recommendation: The State Party is urged to ensure that state policy and practice is wholly reflective of the international treaties which it has bound itself to.**

Constitutional and Legislative Framework²

6. The DPRK’s Constitution, adopted in 1948, revised in 1972, and further modified in 1992 and 1998 guarantees in basic form the human rights identified by the UN and the international system³. However, the interpretation of these rights differs substantially from internationally recognised standards. The DPRK Government argues that developmental rights take precedence over civil and political rights, and moreover, such rights are guaranteed and respected not as rights but awarded at the goodwill of the “Dear Leader”.

¹ See Appendix 1.1 and attached CSW Report, “A Case to Answer – A Call to Act” p91

² See Appendix 1.1: CSW Report, p18

³ See Articles 62 et seq. of the 1998 Constitution

- 7. Recommendation: Despite recent reforms, the Constitution must be modernised further. It needs to be a basis from which human rights can be protected, and from which all rights are recognised as equal, innate and inalienable.**

PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE GROUND

Cooperation with human rights mechanisms

8. The regime has displayed a strong recalcitrance towards engaging with international bodies, exhibited in its worrying and continued failure to recognise the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

- 9. Recommendation: The DPRK is implored to recognise the mandate of the Rapporteur. In furtherance, the Government should extend a standing invitation to all Human Rights Council thematic special procedures.**

Implementation of human rights obligations

Equality and non discrimination⁴

10. Despite constitutional guarantees, *de jure* the principle of non-discrimination⁵ is not respected. Although it is less explicit than in the past, the *songbun* discriminatory system stands in clear violation. Citizens are placed under one of three classes depending on their loyalty to the regime, with a further 51 sub-classes. Criminal punishment, access to education, employment, health benefits and even such basic necessities as food distribution are all issued on the basis of one’s placing. Those in the hostile class account for 27 percent of the population, are generally national enemies, such as religious believers and political opponents, and are treated extremely harshly.

- 11. Recommendation: Starting with the abolition of the *songbun* system, the State Party needs to monitor and strengthen the implementation of existing laws, beginning with a full compliance of the ICCPR and the ICESCR.**

Right to life, liberty and Security of person

a) The right to life

i. “Positive Measures”⁶

12. General Comment 6⁷ obliges State Parties to “adopt positive measures” to protect the right to life⁸. In contrast, North Korea’s political prison camp policy appears calculated to cause the death of hundreds of thousands⁹. The pitiful food rations¹⁰ combined with the system of forced labour ensures that constant hunger and deprivation pervades the prison system. Authorities have seemingly taken no steps to provide the levels of food required in order to reduce mortality significantly. In the forced labour system¹¹, a systematic and long-standing practice, prisoners are forced to complete work such as mining, logging and intensive factory labour on

⁴ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p19

⁵ ICCPR, Article 2 (1) and Article 26; and ICESCR Article 2 (2)

⁶ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p26

⁷ ICCPR, General Comment 6

⁸ ICCPR, Article 6

⁹ While it is impossible to give a precise figure for the number of detainees in the political prison camps, it is believed to be around 200,000. See Appendix 1.1, CSW Report p27

¹⁰ See Appendix 1.1.1.1 for relevant testimony

¹¹ See Appendix 1.1.1.2 for relevant testimony

the barest of food rations, leaving them prone to fatigue and sickness, and in many cases, to eventual death. Such a practice also violates the international prohibition on forced labour¹². It is little wonder that the system has been labelled a de facto death penalty¹³.

13. Article 6 further necessitates States Parties to adopt measures which seek to reduce infant mortality and to increase life expectancy¹⁴. The practice within the detention and imprisonment system substantially conflicts with this. Pregnancies are generally disallowed within the prisons, and thus if efforts by the state authorities to induce an abortion have not been successful, testimonies suggest babies alive at birth are killed, usually by being smothered or left face down to die unattended¹⁵. Women detained for having crossed the border into China have suffered similar treatment. Some accounts even describe prisoners being forced to kill their own newly born child. The reason given was the child’s part-Chinese descent¹⁶.

ii. The Death Penalty
- “Most serious crimes”

14. Under Article 6 of the ICCPR, States Parties must restrict the application of the death penalty to the “most serious crimes”. North Korean defectors give testimonies of executions liberally taking place both inside¹⁷ and outside¹⁸ the detention and imprisonment system. Within, the penalty has reportedly been given for acts such as foraging for or stealing food, attempting to escape, rioting, assaulting guards, refusing to abandon religious beliefs, and criticizing the North Korean regime. It has also been used as the punishment for those North Koreans repatriated from China who have had contact with South Koreans or Christians. Outside the system, the acts subject to execution are often similarly simple efforts such as those to secure food, which evidently fails to correlate with the “most serious crimes” stipulation.

- Procedural Guarantees¹⁹

15. The death penalty must only be “carried out pursuant to a final judgment rendered by a competent court”²⁰. However, the competency of the court is highly questionable and the trial standards which they purport are barely comparable to international standards.²¹

b) Right to Liberty and Security of Person

i. Arbitrary deprivation of liberty²²

16. Practice regarding the detention and arrest of offenders²³ clearly violates the international freedom against the arbitrary deprivation of liberty²⁴. In addition, the Government practices the principle of guilt by association, its use dependent upon the presumed political offence and social classification of the prisoner²⁵. Without

¹² ICCPR, Article 8 (3b); Forced Labour Convention (1930), Article 2

¹³ See Appendix 1.1.1.3 for relevant testimony

¹⁴ ICCPR, Article 6; CRC, Article 24 (2a)

¹⁵ Also violates CRC, Article 6

¹⁶ See Appendix 1.1.1.4 for relevant testimony

¹⁷ See Appendix 1.1.1.5 for relevant testimony

¹⁸ See Appendix 1.1.1.6 for relevant testimony

¹⁹ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p36

²⁰ ICCPR, Article 6 (2)

²¹ See paragraphs 19-20

²² See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p47

²³ See paragraphs 19-20

²⁴ ICCPR, Article 9; General Comment 8

²⁵ See Appendix 1.1.1.7 and 1.1.1.8 for relevant testimonies

a legal basis, up to three generations – grandparents, parents and children – related to the accused can be incarcerated.

ii. Torture²⁶

17. Within the detention and imprisonment system, torture is a widespread and systematic practice, taking on a variety of forms and often resulting in death²⁷. Torture is regularly used in interrogation facilities, sometimes to the point of disability, paralysis or death. Prisoners have also reportedly been used for medical, chemical and biological experiments²⁸. Additionally, prisoners should not be “subjected to any hardship or constraint other than that resulting from the deprivation of liberty”²⁹. The system of forced labour prisons³⁰ stands in stark contrast to such a requirement.

18. Recommendation: Clearer instructions need to be given to law enforcers to respect human rights, and a monitoring of their work is a prerequisite to ensure accountability. The State must put an end to executions and abuses against the liberty and security of the person. The death penalty should only be an exceptional measure for punishment, if used at all, and it should operate under a legal system which guarantees fair trial standards. The detention system should strictly mirror international standards, and all those presently detained arbitrarily should be released.

Administration of justice and the rule of law

19. A tenuous separation of powers ensures that the North Korean judiciary does not function as an independent branch of government³¹: all judicial appointments are made by the executive, the judiciary does not engage in judicial review of legislation, and its functions are exercised under the authority of the Supreme People’s Assembly³².

20. Those accused of breaching the criminal law are generally subject to formal judicial procedures, while those considered to be political offenders have no recourse to them.³³ The latter are removed, investigated (typically under torture) and have their cases decided, all by the State Security Protection Agency. There is no access to legal counsel, or to challenge the legality of their detention. Once “guilt” has been formally established, they are transferred to a political prison. Those deemed to have committed minor crimes may be sent extra judicially to short-term forced labour punishment facilities. Even work superiors can administratively sentence employees to such terms. Those accused of breaching the criminal law are usually subject to formal judicial procedures, however these trials still breach international law³⁴. Eyewitnesses and video footage testify to the practice of executions following summary trials, in which defendants are typically dragged out in front of a crowd, given no opportunity to speak, and then executed. There also lacks a satisfactory mechanism in the judicial system to allow for the right of appeal³⁵.

²⁶ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p37 & p48

²⁷ Contravenes ICCPR, Article 10

²⁸ Contravenes ICCPR, Article 7

²⁹ ICCPR, General Comment 21

³⁰ See paragraph 12

³¹ As required by ICCPR, Article 14 (1)

³² See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p17

³³ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report Pp24-25

³⁴ ICCPR, Article 14

³⁵ Contravenes ICCPR, Article 14 (6)

21. Recommendation: A review of the political, legislative and judicial system is imperative so as to ensure a judiciary which is “competent, independent and impartial”. All professionals involved with the system of justice need to be trained on relevant international standards so as to ensure a fair trial for every offender.

Freedom of religion or belief³⁶

22. Despite stated respect for freedom of religious belief in the DPRK constitution³⁷, religious repression has been brutal. The treatment of Christians has been particularly harsh, with serious abuses committed against them and multiple executions and transfers to political prison camps taking place. Such treatment strongly indicates genocidal intent and practice³⁸.

23. In recent years, the DPRK Government has overtly attempted to demonstrate greater religious freedom, establishing some state-controlled religious bodies and allowing a few religious places of worship to function, albeit under tight restrictions.³⁹ While there is some discussion as to whether those in the state-sanctioned bodies are true religious believers who have been permitted a measure of freedom to practise their faith, none would contend that there is liberty to freely follow the faith of one’s choice according to one’s conscience.

24. Recommendation: The State Party must respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as enshrined in international law, and this should be reflected in policy and practice. Suitable measures must be in place to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination on grounds within Article 18 ICCPR. There needs to be an encouragement of religious tolerance and dialogue throughout society.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers⁴⁰

25. Article 233 of the North Korean penal code stipulates that it is a crime to cross the country’s border without government permission⁴¹. Regardless, food shortages, economic hardship, class-based discrimination and government repression have encouraged a significant number of North Koreans to flee the country, an estimated 30-50,000 at present. Arrest teams are dispatched to find and forcibly repatriate those who have left, in cooperation with China on the other side of the border⁴². Those who are returned face interrogation, mistreatment, torture, and, in the worst cases, long-term imprisonment or execution. There is also significant defector testimony that women repatriated from China who are pregnant face forced abortion and the killing of their babies⁴³.

26. Recommendation: The State Party is urged to change their policy and practice to ensure that no one is subjected to punishment for leaving their country. Instead of criminalising the victims, the DPRK should focus on addressing the root causes behind the refugees’ plight.

³⁶ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p52

³⁷ Article 68: “Citizens have freedom of religious beliefs”

³⁸ See Appendix 1.1.1.9 for relevant testimony

³⁹ The religious bodies are the Korean Christian Federation, the Korean Buddhist Federation, the Korean Catholic Association, the Korean Cheondokyo Association and the Korean Orthodox Association

⁴⁰ See Appendix 1.1; CSW Report p23; relevant testimonies in Appendix 1.2

⁴¹ Violates ICCPR, Article 12

⁴² Contravening Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), Article 33; and UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Article 3

⁴³ See Paragraph 13

APPENDIX

1.1 CSW 2007 Report – North Korea: A Case to Answer, A Call to Act

The report considers the available evidence, and concludes that there is a prima facie case for the commission of crimes against humanity. It also examines the possibility of genocide and concludes there are indicators of genocide against religious groups, specifically Christians, implemented in particular in the 1950s and 1960s.

The CSW Report is attached with this submission, and is available in hard copy by request from our London office.

1.1.1 Testimonies from Report

1.1.1.1 Lee Yeong-Guk, former bodyguard of Kim Jong-Il and former prisoner of Yodeok Political Prison Camp

“Prisoners who committed misdemeanours such as economic crimes received beans as well as corn for meals and that’s why there were much less likely to suffer from malnutrition. However, political prisoners were given only corn in a small cup, mixed with soup cooked with dried radish leaves. The radish leaves were leftovers and were marinated. There were no other side dishes. Corn and soup were all for three meals. We were made to work for 14 hours on a daily basis and if one prisoner does not work as well as guards expected, the whole group of 2-300 would be beaten up together. This is the way that they make prisoners watch each other. We caught mice and snakes for nutrition and ate them”.

1.1.1.2 Kang Cheol-Hawn, former child prisoner at Yodeok Political Prison Camp

“The political prisoners are not seen as human beings, rather as small parts of a big machine; treated worse than dogs and cats. Their reasoning is paralysed because they have to live like machines; they have no energy reserves to think. They get up at 5 o’clock in the morning and are subject to roll call three times a day to make sure that they stay at their respective sites of unspeakably hard labour. The prisoners would suffer injuries and illnesses – on average five or six out of ten prisoners would always be injured or die because they caught a disease. The types of labour they have to do include gold mining, quarrying, felling, road construction, livestock rearing and production for foreign currency such as medicinal herbs, high quality timber and alluvial gold extracts. If they fail more than twice to be counted during the roll call, they are treated as having attempted to escape and are killed. With meagre food rations of corn, salt and soup made from waste leftovers, prisoners had to work 14 hours a day and often longer if their daily work quota had not been met. You did not normally get to sleep until after 10 at night but for those who had to carry on working, they would not be allowed to sleep. There are many children in the North Korean concentration camps because of the family quarters. Technically speaking, there are schools but these are just the meeting places where children gather for forced labour. The children have to endure more brutal labour than the adults. The reason why they have a higher death rate than the adults is because they are driven hard at work and they have malnutrition.”

1.1.1.3 Kim Young-Soon, former prisoners at Yodeok Political Prison Camp

“They are death camps. It would be kinder to kill outright, but in North Korea they make the process long, protracted and painful. One experiences ongoing agony and suffering leading to death instead of a quick death. The gruesome life and suffering is not a life anyone would want: the same horrific lifestyle, being forced to work from very early in the morning, day in day out, filled with abhorrent suffering. It is much better to be shot dead”.

1.1.1.4 Lee Mi-Suk, former detainee at North Pyeongan Provincial Police Detention Centre in South Sinuiju

“One morning I had to help escort three pregnant women to a military hospital outside North Pyeongan Provincial Police Detention Centre in South Sinuiju. The first woman was a 27-year old from Chongjin who was full term. The second was a 22-year-old from Musan who was also full term. The third was aged 30 and was about eight months pregnant. Because I was supposed to help escort the lady from Chongjin, I was in the room when she gave birth. This was the first time in my life that I saw a newborn baby. It was very tiny. It cried and moved its arms and legs. When the baby was born the umbilical cord was cut and then one of the nurses took the baby. She then took a wet cloth and smothered the baby to kill it. They killed the baby in the mother’s presence. She was beside herself, crying, shrieking and screaming. When the baby stopped breathing the nurse wrapped it in a white cloth and took it away.

The nurses were acting like police officers. They said the baby was a “chink” and that they did not want Chinese babies. When I saw this I wondered what kind of crimes these women had committed to suffer this penalty. The nurses obviously believed defecting to be a serious crime against the fatherland and showed no mercy because they considered the baby to be born to a serious criminal. Seeing this made me want to stop living.

The other women also gave birth to living babies. I could not see them as they were behind another partition, but they were killed in the same way. Other girls saw such things and told me about them. The women who gave birth returned to jail later in the day to start work the next day. There was no special meal for them. I saw the lady from Chongjin when she came back. Her eyes were swollen and she kept crying. She was so sad, so depressed.

There were over ten pregnant women who forcibly lost their babies during the 50 days that I was there. Some were given an injection. Some babies were lost through forced abortion, others were delivered dead and others were born alive and then killed. The second time I was arrested, I was again sent to North Pyeongan Provincial Police Detention Centre. This time, there were three women who were three or four months pregnant and they were all subjected to forced abortion.”

1.1.1.5 Lee Yeong-Guk, former bodyguard of Kim Jong-Il and former prisoner at Yodeok Political Prison Camp

“When public executions were about to start, they were announced very loudly by the prison guards through speakers; intimidating everyone that they must come out and attend the scene. The maximum number of prisoners who had witnessed public

executions was 2500 and the minimum 500. During my five years prison camp life, three prisoners were publicly executed per month on average. If you calculate the number, I have witnessed about 180 prisoners being executed. Most executed prisoners were in their thirties to forties. More than 99% of them were male. Most of the executed prisoners were those who had no particular grounds for public execution and a few were those who stole food or made an attempt to escape. Public executions were carried out mainly to intimidate prisoners. The prisoners were already beaten before they were hung. They were already half dead when they were taken out and tied to a tree for execution.

1.1.1.6 Lee Jin-Taek, North Korean escapee

“I have witnessed public executions in North Korea many times. There was a public execution in Onsong, my hometown, the day before my defection to China. Whenever there was a public execution posters were put up all around the place. Eventually people were not interested, so they then killed people in the market place where there was already a crowd. It is extremely unpleasant having to watch another man being killed. The first convict I saw was someone who made a mistake in building something. His family background was bad so they killed him. However, after that, the crimes they committed were related to the food shortage, such as stealing cows or food or similar acts. So it was not very pleasant to watch.

Any convict is already half dead by the time he is brought to the execution site. He cannot walk by himself. Guards have to hold him on both sides. He is blindfolded, gagged and tied to a pole. The ropes go around his chest, stomach and legs. First they shoot the rope to break the chest rope, the bullet enters the chest and the person falls forward. The next marksman shoots at the stomach rope and then the last one shoots at the rope around the legs. Then the whole body falls forward to the ground. Then they shoot him indiscriminately to make sure he is dead. There is only a short interval of a few seconds between the first and second bullet because when the chest rope breaks, the upper body starts falling.

After the convict is dead, they roll the dead body in a straw mat. It is put into a truck and nobody knows where it is taken afterwards.”

1.1.1.7 Lee Min-Bok, former detainee at a police detention centre in Hyesan City

“When I was punished, my mother and sister were banished to a remote, barren and inhospitable hillside village because of my defection. They were fortunate not to have ended up in a camp. North Korea is the only country in the world where this evil practice is performed – due to the perceived offence of a single member of the family the entire family has to be punished.”

1.1.1.8 Kim Young-Soon, former prisoner at Yodeok Political Prison Camp

“Over 60% of the prisoners in Yongpyeong-ri Absolute Control Zone are victims of guilt by association. In other words, they are there simply because they are related to landowners. Japanese collaborators, missionaries, etc.”

1.1.1.9 Ahn Myeong-Cheol, guard at number of political prison camps

“We do not have ethnic groups so the genocide definition does not apply in this regard, but the treatment of Christians precisely fits the genocide definition. The genocide definition fits the policy towards Christians one hundred per cent. There was a special instruction from the political leadership that all religions are social evil. There were speeches, texts, instructions, textbooks and pamphlets covering this. Religion is seen to be like opium and has to be wiped out. When I was on duty I saw many Christians. One is meant to worship only the political leaders and any other worship was a deviation from loyalty to the regime. When North Koreans hear about God they think they are talking about Kim Il-Sung. All North Koreans have this confusion. If anyone embraces Christianity in North Korea they are called a crazy guy. No one could understand or imagine someone wanting to become a Christian. It is very unlikely one could find a descendant of a Christian still living. The camp rules were intended to prevent Christian families. Everyone in the camp was prevented from reproducing. If someone had a baby it would be a problem in the whole camp. Christians were reactionaries and there were lots of instructions and mottos to wipe out the seed of reactionaries. The purpose of the camps I was involved in was to kill the prisoners. Instead of killing them by shooting, the intention was to force them to work to the last minute. The intention was to kill, not to extract labour. The purpose was to kill; the method was just different.”

1.2 Other testimonies by North Korean defectors

1.2.1 Pang Bun-ok

I am prepared to disclose my identity to support my following testimony due to the fact that doing so will not endanger my family in North Korea. My husband died of hunger years ago in North Korea and my children are all safe in South Korea today.

My Family Background

My name is Pang Bun-ok, and I am 55 years old in the current year of 2009. (date of birth: 19 Feb. 1954). My father was a carpenter and my mother was a homemaker. I was born at Shingong-ni, Tongnim-kun, North Pyongan Province, North of Pyongyang. While I was still a toddler, my family moved to Unit 4, Yonam-up, Paegam-kun, Yanggangdo Province, a remote timber production region where I finished compulsory junior high school in 1969. I was 15 years old at that time. I also attended Timber High School for 2 years after the middle school. After working as an accountant at a timber company for approximately five years, I married a miner in 1976 from Musan Coal Mine in Musan district. I have three children from this marriage, two girls and a boy. I was a singer at the Party Propaganda Troupe of the same mine. My first daughter eventually became a state singer/dancer in Pyongyang. My address in Musan: Unit 187, Musan-up, Musan-kun, North Hamkyong Province.

First Defection to China

My husband died of starvation in 1997 during some of the worst times of the famine. Motivated by anger against the government and my own hunger, I defected to China in June 1998 with my two children (my first daughter had already been missing for some time.) I was soon separated from my two children in China as I fell victim to human traffickers. I was sold to a Chinese farmer in Shandong Province, who at that

time was about 50 years old man, physically disabled and very poor. It was a hopeless situation as I was virtually locked up most of the time and monitored by family and villagers without any knowledge of where I was and without any grasp of the Chinese language. I was continually tormented by the thought of what must have happened to my children. Some months later, when everyone in the village was in the field, a strange gang of young Chinese men broke open the gate and came through my door and kidnapped me to another village at some distance on a motor bicycle. My life then took another dismal turn as I learned that I was to be sold to another Chinese man, this time a man much younger than I. I soon learned that this man was emotionally unstable and wild. He frequently threatened his own parents, brothers and villagers with a dagger. I was so terrified that I became an extremely submissive and compliant wife to him to avoid, at all costs, raising his ire. One day, I was asked to bring him some rice wine from the village shop. I offered him food and drink and he asked me to drink with him. When I finished a second cup, he suddenly became drowsy and fell sound asleep. Sensing a rare opportunity, I looked around and saw that the front gate was unlocked. I ventured outside the gate to explore the edge of the village for the very first time. As I walked further on, I found no one in the village. Then, I began to run with all my strength, continued on over some hills and eventually came upon a village with a public telephone. There I called my first contact in China to ask for help. Following directions from this contact, I boarded a bus to Hwaeryong, a small Chinese town near the border. Shortly before arriving at the border town, the bus was boarded and I was arrested by the Chinese police. It was the fall of 1999.

Musan SSA, Labor Training Camp and Police

Approximately 40 other North Korean defectors were in the Chinese prison where I was taken upon arrest. I was in the prison for about 15 days, then was forcibly repatriated to North Korea. On arrival in the State Security Agency (SSA) in Musan District in North Korea, we were all strip-searched by female staff at the SSA office (telephone operators and kitchen staff). We were forced to repeatedly squat and stand upright as a way of dislodging hidden money from the vagina and anus. It goes without saying that being subjected to such a procedure was utterly debasing and humiliating.

The SSA facility was so crowded that they kept me there for only three days, then dispatched me to a labor training camp where I was detained for two months. The camp had a fairly large playground and we, including some elderly women, were forced to run 100 laps around it. When any woman would fall during the forced running exercise, guards would mercilessly kick the weak and old women hard, saying, “You bitches! You traitors!” The inmates in the camp included a young girl, about 21 years old from Musan, Yonghi by name, who was in her seventh month of pregnancy. The guards were particularly brutal to her and kicked her stomach area frequently. The training officer (I cannot remember his name) was in his 40’s and had the grim nickname, Stinging Wasp (Oppasi). He stood about 1.65 m tall and was particularly cruel to inmates. Four prisoners died at the camp during the two months I was there.

I was then sent to the Musan Police for interrogation. No less than 40 prisoners were squeezed into my 3 x 5 meter cell, a very small cell. This cramped space was full of lice, fleas and other insects. Altogether, there were several hundred prisoners in the police station.

We were brutally treated there. All the pregnant women were forced to abort. Yonghi refused the order in an attempt to save her baby. She was singled out, badly beaten and forced to abort by two male prisoners who were forced to jump on a wooden plank laid over her abdomen. I was hit by a square bar and kicked by guards so severely that I had four upper teeth and four bottom teeth broken. To this day I carry the scar on my head. My left leg and thigh were badly swollen by vicious kicks by guards. These wounds later developed into osteomyelitis in the absence of adequate medical treatment.

Women prisoners were often forced to stand on their head and hands to make them a better target for kicking. The guards often humiliated and made fun of prisoners to kill time. One day, they shaved head of an old man, about 65, and painted a funny face on his forehead to make him appear comical. They forced him to walk back and forth in a military parade style for hours for their amusement. There was a tiny toilet in the cell and a water faucet that lacked running water most of the time.

As prisoners were not considered human beings, we were not allowed to even make eye contact with the guards. During my detention at this facility for six months, July 1999 to January 2000, prisoners died at the average of one prisoner per day. Eventually, I was tried and sentenced to imprisonment for five years for the crime of defecting to China. By this time, I was in such a weakened state that authorities thought my death was imminent. As a result, I was released on sick bail in early 2000.

Prison in Hamhung

I managed to regain some strength and health in the following three months and in May, 2000, I reported to the police to serve the remainder of my prison term. I was sent to Prison No. 15, Songwon-ni, Hweson District, Hamhung, South Hamkyong Province. On arrival at the prison, I was so shocked to see 700 women prisoners, whom I later learned had been transferred from Chungsan Prison. They looked so wretched that, in many cases, their profiles did not even appear human. The prison facilities were very primitive: earthen walls, a thatched roof and a rock floor. Prisoners often found snakes and frogs in the crevices of these rocks. Whenever such a discovery would be made, women prisoners would jump to catch it, then kill and eat it raw.

The poor and inadequate farm tools made weeding and other farm work extremely difficult. Some cows were kept on the prison grounds. Prisoners would secretly search for undigested beans or corn kernels in the cow droppings. Prison rules strictly forbade eating anything other than the daily ration. Prisoners would grab the bits of beans and corn from the dung at the first opportunity, quickly wipe them off on their clothes and eat them. A woman in my unit was caught eating beans from the cow dung one day and was so badly beaten that she became almost disfigured. The ensuing punishment was to withhold both her and my food ration for the next three days, as I was the leader of the unit she was in. Prisoners died here at the average of a prisoner every other day. I remember seeing a boiler and a small forklift that was used to carry short lengths of firewood to the boiler. As the forklift was small and dead bodies were too long to balance easily, prison workers used the forklift to bend and break the dead bodies of prisoners so that they could more easily be piled up together with short lengths of firewood. All the prisoners believed that the dead prisoners were disposed of in the boiler. This “hell” lasted about two years. I was then released under amnesty in January of 2002.

Second Defection and Arrival in South Korea

Not long after my release, there was unbelievably good news from my Chinese contact. My eldest daughter and son were safe in South Korea! I mustered all my courage and managed to defect to China yet again in October, 2003. I arrived in South Korea on 8 January 2004 via the South Korean Embassy in Beijing. My son later found my missing daughter in China and made successful arrangement to bring her to Korea. I am very happy to be reunited with all my children in South Korea today even though I am very poor on the welfare program of the government. I tried to find work as a dressmaker but was prevented from doing so by my poor health. Occasionally, I join in singing and dancing performances at various Christian churches.

1.2.2 Mr Kim

My name Mr. Kim and I am 49 years old in 2009 as I was born in 1960 in Onsong district in North Hamkyong Province in North Korea, a border town with China. My father was a factory clerk and my mother was a cook at a state-run restaurant for workers. I finished my senior middle school in 1976 when I was 16 years old and remained as a military base construction worker for 24 years until my first defection to China in May, 2000.

I was married when I was 29 years old and have two girls from this marriage. They are now 15 years and 17 years old respectively.

In May, 2000, out of curiosity, I crossed the border to China and bought a few items of clothing and shoes for my children before returning to North Korea the next day. I was arrested in North Korea a few days later as the local police detected my children wearing new clothing and shoes. I was subjected to very rough police interrogation for about a week. During this time I was badly beaten with both of my hands handcuffed. Out of desperation, I managed to find a way to escape the detention facility, still handcuffed, while the interrogator was asleep. I defected to China immediately.

In the winter of 2002, my wife and daughters joined me in China. A Chinese farmer, my employer, betrayed my presence to the local police in the summer of 2003 when I demanded from him my unpaid back wages. I was repatriated to North Korea but was released after a week with the help of a State Security Agency officer (SSA), a relative of my wife’s family. I managed to defect to China a few days later, this time even more disillusioned with the North Korean system.

However, I was arrested and repatriated to North Korea by the Chinese police in the winter of 2004 with my daughters. I was interrogated at the Onsong District SSA facility over a six-month period. Despite extreme coercion by the SSA, I refused to confess that I’d tried to go to South Korea. I was so badly treated and undernourished at this time that it was generally assumed I was going to die. My SSA Interrogator, Captain Park Chol-wu, about 50 years old, 1.65 metre tall, beat virtually every part of my body on a daily basis with a length of vinyl water hose. This method allowed him to beat me using his full strength, but without breaking bones and leaving any serious bruises or marks on my skin. I was so badly undernourished that my average weight of 65 kg. plummeted to 29 kgs. during this very difficult period. The SSA was very careful not to allow me to die while in their custody and sent me to the local police,

clearing me of political offense. The local police kept me in their detention facility for about a month before they attempted to transfer me to a local prison that refused to accept me because it appeared that my death was imminent. During this single month at the local police station, I saw no less than 18 prisoners die in the police cellblock.

Eventually, I was released on sick bail. Unable to walk on my own, my brother pulled me to his home with the use of a small cart. I was so disillusioned by the North Korean judicial systems by this time and the fear of re-arrest was so real that I mustered the strength and determination to defect to China about two weeks later. This was in the summer of 2005. With the help of Chinese friends, I was among the 29 North Koreans who sought asylum in the Japanese School in Dalian, China. South Korean Embassy staff noted my deteriorated health and strength and put me first in line to fly to Seoul almost immediately while stronger refugees were asked to be patient for some months.

I was treated by the state hospital in Seoul. A full health checkup revealed serious problems with my heart, kidneys and blood pressure. I am now securely settled in Seoul but still unable to work. I am now slowly regaining my health and am now able to walk for 20 to 30 minutes at a time. I am on the government’s welfare funds for survival. My two daughters are still in North Korea and that is the reason I cannot disclose my name. My deepest desire is to bring my children to Seoul as soon as possible.

1.2.3 Anonymous

The husband was born in China and his family returned to North Korea when he was one years old. Before escaping to China, he was working in an arms factory. He chose to leave for political reasons (he was not a trouble maker as such but disagreed with the government). Note that his family had a lot of interaction with Chinese who visited North Korea. He fled to China in 1994 before Kim Il Sung’s death. He lived in China for approximately 9 years, became a chef, opened a restaurant and bought an apartment. He met his wife in China, also a North Korean refugee. They were both denounced by a Korean Chinese, apparently jealous of their success, who sold them for 300 Won or 50 dollars (which is an average monthly salary in China) respectively. Korean Chinese are encouraged by the Chinese government to denounce North Koreans.

They were both sent to some kind of a prison (they used the word prison in Korean not camp). He was badly tortured and beaten and is now suffering from a heart condition as a result. He has also several scars on his legs and must use an electrical lift to go up the stairs in their house. They were forced to work from 6am to 7pm everyday, were given some sort of a very liquid soup to eat three times a day and were allowed the toilet one time a day. Every day in the evenings, they also received re-education lectures for two hours. He was released after one year and his wife after 6 months.

They both escaped again to China and came to the UK around a year ago. The wife had originally left the country with her younger brother and mother after the death of the father. The brother did not want to do the military service/join the army. Before being arrested, she had been living in China for 7 years. She was also tortured in prison and has a nasty scar on her right foot. When they crossed the border they received no help but they both learned Chinese, which helped them dramatically. The

chose to come to the UK because they thought their families in North Korea would be in trouble if the authorities knew where they were. Interestingly they had never heard of Christianity while in North Korea and cannot say they met any Christian while in prison. The man is confident that everybody in North Korea knows how well South Koreans are doing and his message to North Koreans is: “run away”.