

North Korea Human Rights Crisis and Christian Response: A Korean American Perspective

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Introduction

On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations has opened a new era in human history by adopting and proclaiming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Assembly subsequently called upon all member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration urging them “to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories.” This great human achievement, however, has been continuously challenged, attacked, manipulated, and violated by those who would not listen to this harmonious voice of humankind.

This paper is designed to deal with one of the most systemically, but clandestinely operated human rights violations in today’s world: the human rights crisis of North Korea. In dealing with the human rights crisis of North Korea, my paper will focus on the following questions respectively: ‘What has been happening in North Korea?’; ‘What caused the human rights crisis in the country?’; and ‘What are we supposed to do facing this crisis?’ In particular, in answering the latter question, I will give a special attention to the possible roles and responsibilities that the churches of the world can play and take.

II. The Human Rights Situation in North Korea

For the past decades, there have been increasing accusations against North Korea for its worsening human rights status. For a political reason, these accusations have not been well received in the past. North Korean government simply disregarded them as

mere anticommunist propaganda by South Korean government against its own regime. As a result of this, much needed attention has been delayed until recent years when an increasing number of defectors began to report what has been going on in various places of North Korea. Even though the full revelation of the human rights situation in North Korea seems to be beyond the capacity of this paper, I will try to describe the human rights situation by uncovering the three most vulnerable groups of the people in North Korea: political prisoners, socially marginalized people, and defectors.

1. Political Prisoners

There are allegedly 12 concentration camps in North Korea where the human rights violation is commonly taken place in its most excruciating and gravest way. The existence of these camps are now relatively well-known, and recently the infamous Yo-Dok concentration camp in Hamkyong Namdo area was videotaped and even enlisted on an internet website(<http://www.kccnk.org>). According to the bill titled “North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004,” the government of North Korea holds an estimated 200,000 political prisoners in camps. The camps are managed by state Security Agency through the use of “forced labor, beating, torture, and executions.” (4) It is also reported that many prisoners die from disease, starvations, and exposure. According to eyewitness testimony provided to the US Congress by North Korean camp survivors, camp inmates have been even used as targets for martial arts practice as well as experimental victims in the testing of chemical and biological poisons (5).

According to Heo Man-Ho, a professor at Kyongbuk National University in South Korea, although exact figure is not known, a significant number of South Korean soldiers engaged in the Vietnam War were allegedly sent to North Korea after being arrested by

the Vietcong. It is highly likely that many of whom have been detained in North Korea concentration camps if they are still alive. Various testimonies of defectors in recent years indicate that thousands of prisoners in concentration camps are former party members, former influential politicians, their family members, and individuals who have been critical of the Kim family. A group of people such as pro-Japanese, anti-revolutionary capitalists, and former landowners are also contained in the prison camp, and most of them were reportedly confined without trial or formal charges. (Human Rights in The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 104)

According to Heo, besides the concentration camps which were constructed solely for political prisoners, there are also labor camps, and reformatories as well as facilities that house the homeless and vagrants drastically increased due to the worsening famine situation in late 90s. Concentration camps are reportedly divided into "complete-control districts" and the "revolutionized districts" (Choi. 282). The complete-controls districts are exclusively for those given life terms. Since they will never return to society alive, there is no ideological education for them. They are only obliged to work like slave at mines and logging yards under horrible working conditions (Choi. 282). The revolutionized districts on the other hand are divided into family and bachelor sections. Inmates of the revolutionized districts consist mostly of Pyongyang's ex-elites, repatriates from Japan who have personal connections with senior officials of the pro-Pyongyang association of Korean Residents in Japan, Chochongryon, and their families. The policy is to have them go through physical difficulties and thus make them more obedient to the Kim Jung-II system when they return to society. The great number of other political prisoners are held at the lifetime complete-control districts. Only a small

number of life-term prisoners are reportedly transferred from complete-control districts to revolutionized districts (Choi, 282).

According to a testimony of Myung-chul Ahn, who was formerly a security officer in camp 13 and 22 – Chongson and Hoeryong family camps –, public execution was occurred in the camp “to instill fear in the witnesses and to make an example of the victim” (Testimony, 42)). In 1990, there was a riot in the camp 14 – Kaechon family camp – after inmates watching a public execution. The riot was suppressed after random firing at the crowd of inmates, resulting in the death of 1500 prisoners and 8 security officers (Testimony of the First North Korean Escapes from Camp No. 14, 42)

One of the shocking revelations made by the former camp guards is the existence of Caucasian prisoners presumably American and/or British POWs from the Korean War (Testimony, 43). Kim Young, who defected to South Korea in December 1999, testified that he saw Caucasian prisoners once when he was assigned on special duty to work outside the Mujin No. 2 mine. In May 1999, a large-scale construction to expand the road along Daedon River was in progress at top speed. To meet the labor needs, all prisoners from Camp No. 14 were mobilized to work on this one project. This was the first time Kim saw women and Caucasian prisoners. According to his reports, they appeared to be in their 70s, and they seemed to be above in heights, but their backs were bent. The foreign POWs were captured during the Korean War, and they were allegedly put in the prison upon Kim Il-sung’s order: ‘let them see with their own eyes how North Korea, the country they tried to fell, prospers.’ (Testimony, 43)

Their everyday living situation is indeed beyond our normal imagination. According to the testimony by North Korean escapees, the prisoners are given a

miniscule amount of food, about 25 ears of corn per meal with some salt. For this reason, hunting for rats, snakes, and insects are not uncommon. Each month a prisoner receives 500g of salt and a piece of soap. The salt is taken at mealtimes and used to clean the mouth. Once or twice a year the prisoners are given a special treat for their good work, a piece of remainder from extracting oil from beans. Salt is a precious commodity in the camps and each guards his salt with special care during his sleep: either by holding the small sack of salt in his hand or placing it in his crotch. (Testimony, 44)

2. Socially Marginalized People

North Korea's human rights violation is not limited to those who are imprisoned in concentration camps. Ordinary people in the country are also subject to the wide range of violation. First, although the North Korean Constitution stipulates the rights of travel in Article 13, the North Korea's Penal Code severely restrict on this right. For example, Article 230 of the Penal Code states that "[c]rossing the border without permission" is punished by imprisonment for up to three years (Human Rights, 121). It is virtually impossible for North Korean may travel abroad without risking him/her as well as his/her family. Article 70 of the Penal Code can impose group criminal responsibility for the family of soldier who leaves the country.

There are other restrictions limiting people's rights to travel and move. According to Provisionary People's Committee (PPC) Act No. 57, which was adopted with regulations on March 7th, 1947 and appears to still in force, all citizens over 18 years of age must carry a citizen ID card issued by the Public Security Ministry (Human Rights, 122). The current interviews with the defectors also suggest that the entry or exit to Pyongyang requires such ID cards. There are also other regulations such as Article 3 and

13 of PPC Act No. 57, which regulate the duration of people's stay in visiting place (90 days without permission) and the duty of reporting their change of residence to the Ministry. The government strictly restricts the freedom of movement in Pyongyang (Human Rights, 122).

Second, the freedom of expression in North Korea is systemically under control by the government and secret agencies. According to the report of Amnesty International 2003, political opposition of any kind was not tolerated during its research in 2002. The report writes, “[A]ny person who expressed an opinion contrary to the position of the ruling Korean Workers’ Party faced severe punishment, and so did their family in many cases.” Not only the domestic news, but also international media broadcasts are strictly censored, and thus people’s access to these media is severely limited. Regarding the freedom of expression, North Korea’s religious freedom seems to reveal the most systematic distortion of basic human rights. North Korean Constitution officially guarantees the religious freedom, but it is sharply curtailed by the government. According to the Amnesty report of 2003, there were reports of severe repression of people involved in public and private religious activities, including imprisonment, torture and executions. It also affirms that many Christians are reportedly being held in labor camps, where they had to face torture and starvation. The denial of Amnesty International and other human rights observers particularly make it hard to have a more comprehensive information on the violation of the freedom of expression in North Korea.

Like the freedom of expression, the freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed by the North Korean Constitution. Article 20 stipulates that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is available to everyone, and no one may

be compelled to belong to an association. A number of provisions of the Penal Code, however, violate not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 20), but also the freedom of association guaranteed by the Constitution. According to *Human Rights*, Article 78 of the Penal Code can punish ‘organized activity’ and ‘participation in an organization created to challenge state sovereignty’ by death (165). Article 82 also stipulates that the organization of bands or participation therein can also be punished by death. The explicit threat by death to any organized activities of people severely hampers people’s freedom of association and assembly. All organization and associations, including women’s organizations, religious association, unions, and political parties are controlled by the government (Human Rights, 166). Instead of participating in free organizations, many ordinary people and citizens are obliged to join the government organized associations to display their loyalty to Kim Jung Il.

3. North Korean Defectors

Since the early 90s, North Korea has been suffering from its economic downfall. In particular, a series of natural disasters of mid 90s and the failures of state-run economy put North Korea’s total economic system into an irrevocable and irreversible situation. The loss of preferential trade with the former Soviet Union and China was also an important factor that plunged North Korea into a serious condition. By the end of 1992, the North Korean government began to impose strict limits on food consumption, limiting individual intake to one-fourth of basic requirements (Amnesty International December 2000). The growing food shortages led large numbers of North Koreans to flee the country for their own survival since mid 90s. No one knows now how many defectors have fled from the country to China and other countries in South Asia.

According to the reports in the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, between 1994 and 2003, South Korea has admitted approximately 3,800 North Korean refugees. Last August in 2004, more than 450 refugees came to South Korea within a week period. The growing numbers of defectors are now becoming a serious issue to North Korean government. North Korean government is now increasing its numbers of military guards along its boarder line near China.

According to the report by Suzanne Scholte – President of Defense Forum Foundation – before the Joint Hearing held on April 28, 2004, there are 50,000 to 350,000 of these refugees in China and other countries. Currently it is difficult to get a more accurate figure because China blocks access to them, even blocks the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) from them. Suzanne Scholte reports also that there are aboutt 10 humanitarian workers in jail for trying to help these refugees (Joint Hearing, 86). Regarding those defectors who were apprehended in China and forcibly returned to North Korea, little was known about what happened to them after their return. Personal stories from individual defectors are even more horrible to imagine. Particularly female defectors are much more vulnerable to immediate threats and dangers. According to KCC Journal, many of them have been sold to Chinese by ‘human hunters’ with less than 100 US dollars as house maids or sex slaves. The Journal also reports that there would be at least 20,000 North Korean orphans in China. Most of them have lost their parents either in North Korea or in China. For them, the streets of foreign country could be nothing but the desolate place of imminent threats of death and abuse.

Many of these defectors chose to flee their country risking their lives because they couldn’t survive in North Korea. According to the Weekly Korea on October 6, 2004, the

mortality rate of North Korean infants is as 11times higher than that of South Korea. More than 10 million women and children are suffering chronic and serious starvation and illness. Some people even report that the disastrous situation of North Korea is now even worse than that of 80's Ethiopian famine. Hundreds of thousands of children and adult patients are not even receiving the basic medical treatment because of the sheer lack of medicine and medical equipments. The human rights situation of North Korean is particularly dark and grim when it comes to children. In 2002, UNICEF had a research on North Korean children's nutritive conditions by surveying 6000 households. The result turned out to be alarming. Among 2.5 million children under age 5, about the half of children (1.2 million) were underfed. 800,000 children under age 7 were having dystrophy, and 70,000 children were in danger of death due to the acute and severe dystrophy. Unless such dire situation would not be fixed and improved, the human rights violation against defectors is likely getting worse rather than better.

III. Analysis of the Critical Situation in North Korea

The human rights crisis in North Korea does not occur out of nowhere. There have been ideological and systemic reasons behind these colossal abuses. We will here deal with these reasons by looking at them in two different aspects: internal and external. By 'internal,' this means the unique and distinct ideological, political and legal system of North Korea, whereas, by 'external,' this means the global or geopolitical situation that surrounds the Korean Peninsula. Among the internal reasons, the first one we need to see is North Korea's ruling ideology named "Juche Ideology."

Sungchul Choi points out in his *Human Rights and North Korea* that the political system of North Korea is based upon Juche ideology (150). Juche ideology proclaims not

only the supremacy of human beings as world masters, but also the Suryung's (Great Leader) sole means of rule as its operating leadership guide. According to Choi, Juche ideology thus claims, "the true masters of the world are 'only those laboring masses who faithfully follow the suryung's orders'" by excluding the bourgeoisies (150). Juche ideology can be defined as the ideology of control which regulates the total life-system of North Korean people. Being stipulated in the Article 3 of the North Korean constitution, "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea takes the Juche ideology as the world's view with emphasis on people and on revolutionary ideology to actualize the independence of the nation."

According to Choi, although Juche ideology is about socialism, it is a "new form of socialism" that emphasizes not only independence, creativity and conscience of laboring masses, but also the prominent and right leader for them. He writes, "[A]ccording to Juche, the historic development of society will only occur with the right leaders. The guidance of the people is the function of the 'Party and the Great Leader'..." (151). To sum up, Juche ideology is a political theory, which holds that only the workers who faithfully perform the "Great Leader's teaching" are true citizens (151).

The role of the Great Leader named 'suryung' is crucial in Juche ideology along with its emphasis of the workers' party. The suryung as the center of the socio-political group organizes and constitutes a socio-political organic body of laboring masses that possesses an eternal independent life energy. Just as the brain exists at the center of life of individual people, the suryung exists in the socio-political group as the premier cerebrum of the group (151).

According to this ideology, only those who are organizationally and ideologically united under the direction of the party and the suryung can maintain their existence deriving meaning out of the system. The unconditional loyalty to the suryung Kim Ilsung and Kim Jungil is absolutely required, and thus individuals cannot exist on their own without this unconditionally loyal relation with the suryung. Choi says that the individual living standards must follow “The Ten-Great Principle to Solidify the Unitary Ideological System, ” which was promulgated in 1974 as a set of codes of individual conduct. (152). Under this collectivity-centered political ideology, it is almost impossible to expect individuals-oriented human rights to be guaranteed. No value on the life of the individuals is acknowledged in North Korea’s oppressive political philosophy.

North Korea’s Juche ideology must be understood, as Choi rightly claims, as “personality cult worship of the leader.” Under this political ideology, North Korean people’s basic rights are restricted arbitrarily under the cloak of extreme collectivism (158). What seems to be even more dreadful to us is the distorted view of the desirable human being under its Juche ideology. In its April 28, 1993 issue, North Korea’s official newspaper ‘Rodong Sinnum,’ highly praised two young women who burned to death while trying to remove portraits of Kim Ilsung and Kim Jongil from a burning factory. Unbelievable it may sound though, “the newspaper described it as ‘beautiful conduct’ in which they practiced the leader’s instructions by deed” (159). No religion can allow this. This incident can happen only in extreme cult groups.

The second internal reason we need to look at regarding North Korea’s rampant human rights violation is its legal system, particularly its criminal laws. According to North Korea’s constitution, while there are 17 rights-related articles, only 6 obligation-

related articles are stipulated. However, as Youngsharm Ghim points out, “since there exist no conflicts among the individual, society and the state, the rights of the citizen can be logically interpreted as duties, and as a result, rights and duties are inseparable and combined into one” (407). Among fundamental rights appeared in constitution, Article 63 says: “In the DPRK, the rights and duties of citizens are based on the collectivist principle of one for all and all for one.” Article 82 also stipulates the similar concept: “Collectivism is the basis of social living within socialism. Citizens must cherish their organization and collectivism and demonstrate a character of devoting themselves to society and the populace.” Under this collectivist constitution, individual rights such as equality, participation, and freedom of press, expression, association and assembly cannot be exercised against the state although enumerated in the constitution.

North Korea’s penal code (criminal law) most clearly shows how and why people’s inalienable human rights cannot but be systemically violated. According to Kim, since 1945 North Korea had enacted a series of criminal laws, the Penal Code of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was enacted in 1950 comprising 23 chapters and 301 articles (410). The penal code has been revised in 1974, 1987 and 1992, and the main change in the new code in 1987 was that the ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ in the old code were replaced by ‘antistate crimes’ (411). Antistate crimes include: a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing state sovereignty, terrorism, antistate propaganda and agitation, and so on. If anyone is convicted because of this, he/she faces the death penalty. As Kim argues, the sole purpose of this law is “to protect and defend one-man rule of Kim Il-sung [and Kim Jong-il] and to clear all obstacles to the completion of their socialist revolution”

(411). The penal code is largely characterized in three categories according to Kim: its confidentiality; the undemocratic nature; and anti-unification nature.

Among these categories, especially, the second one is more problematic because the penal code of North Korea allows not only analogical interpreting legal provisions, but also the retrospective effects the penal code. For example, article 10 of the code maintains, “if a criminal act is not directly provided for in this code, the basis and the criminal responsibility thereof shall be decided in accordance with the article of the present code that provides for the acts most analogous to it in important and kind” (Choi, 202). Besides these elements, the abstract nature of articles for punishments leaves much room for the arbitrary application of the code while premeditated and attempted crimes are made punishable by the same provisions (414). According to Sung Chul Choi, North Korean penal law is nothing but a terrorizing means to support the two Kims and the policy of KWP (the Korean Worker’s Party). He writes, “Penal law was designed to maintain the one-party dictatorship and the North Korean system. For the political objective of maintaining the system, penal law violates life and liberty of individual citizens and fosters an atmosphere of terror in order to keep any potential opposition forces in check” (197). Designed to put a surveillance system firmly in place and to prevent any group resentment, the penal code has served as a major political and judicial device to systemically manipulate and violate the inalienable human rights under its own regime.

Lastly we need to look into the geopolitical and international circumstances to analyze the sources of systemic and wide range of human rights violations in North Korea. Wonwoong Lee rightfully points in his paper, “The Character of North Korean

Human Rights Issues and the Direction of Human Rights Policy,” that North Korean human rights crisis is a pathological outcome of South and North Korea’s ideological and militaristic tension and conflict. Coupled with North Korea’s political ambition for the nuclear armament and the neighboring countries’ claim for their own national interests, North Korea’s human rights crisis also becomes a more complex and difficult global issue.

Arguably North Korea is considered one of the most isolated countries, and there is an external element that contributed to this. Since 1953 armistice in the Korean War, a number of nations have imposed both multilateral and bilateral diplomatic and trade sanctions against it for its acts of internal oppression and nuclear armaments policies. Among those having sanctions against the communist country are the United States, Japan, South Korea and the European Union. The separation of one nation into the two ideologically and systemically divided countries has been blamed to become a legitimate ground to check and oppress people’s inalienable and inherent rights in the name of national security and self defense. The wrong situation itself has become the justified source of manipulating, checking, and terrorizing its own peoples.

Indeed, the international dynamic that surrounds the Korean Peninsula has contributed to the problem in a different venue. In particular, the rampant human rights violation in China against the North Korean defectors is an outrageous and pathological result of the failed international politics among the countries in the region. Especially, we need to attend to China’s role regarding the possible human rights disaster in its own territory. According to the Joint Hearing document presented to the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives on April 28, 2004, as a party to the

1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees, and the 1967 protocol by the same name, China is obliged to protect North Korean refugees as the protocol stipulates (25). Such protocols of Article 26 (Freedom to choose place or residence and to move within the territory as accorded to other aliens) and Article 32 (Protection from expulsion from the country), however, are now systemically violated by China. Although China maintains that North Korean asylum seeker is not entitled to refugee protection preventing the UNHCR access to them, in order to comply with international law, it needs to make available fair and efficient asylum adjudication to North Korean asylum seekers. In my perspective, the recent approval of “North Korean Human Rights Acts of 2004” by the U.S. government on Oct. 19, 2004 provides an important example as well as milestone to global community how it can help those vulnerable North Korean defectors.

IV. Crisis and the Critical Response

The Human Rights crisis in North Korea cannot be resolved without global attention and support, which include not only the humanitarian assistance, but also the international and global protest against the violation. It might as well require a geopolitical pressure to the government in North Korea on the consensus of the international community. We will first deal with the urgent need of humanitarian aid for the economically as well as politically marginalized people in North Korea. Later we will also discuss about the international political strategies and direction to handle with the systemic violation of basic rights of the oppressed people in the country. Church’s responsible role to handle this human rights crisis will be discussed in the next chapter.

Humanitarian crisis and human rights crisis are two different concepts, but the former oftentimes provides the condition in which the latter evolves as a pathological

outcome. The case of North Korean defectors is a clear example of this. According to Amnesty International January 2004, since mid 90's the situation in North Korea has been characterized as a "food crisis," and in 2004, 6.5 million North Koreans (a third of the population) – mainly women and children – are in need of food assistance. The severe shortage of food has driven many North Korean people to leave the country for their own survival, and they have largely become the victims of human rights violation in both China and North Korea. According to the report of Amnesty International January 2004, the current food crisis in North Korea does not seem to get any better in the near future. North Korea's total production of grain in 1990 was 9,100,000 (t), and it has radically shrunk down to 3,499,000 (t) in 1995 after the devastating floods. Since then there has not been any significance rebound to 1990 level. The total annual grain production in 2000 was only 3,262,000. With such amount, ordinary citizen would get only 250 grams per day. Last year's (2003) situation got improved compared to the previous years', but the daily portion was still little over 300 grams per day.

In order to respond to the food crisis in North Korea, international communities have earnestly provided humanitarian assistance to North Korean government since 1995. According to Sungho Jeh, UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) has assisted North Korea annually since 1995 by issuing "UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for DPRK." Until 2002, more than 1 billion dollars amount of food have been provided to North Korea through the official UN agencies. The largest contributors to this assistance were the U.S., South Korea, Japan, and E.U. This total amount, however, covers on the average 65 percent of total needs (82).

South Korean government and NGOs, besides its donation through UN agencies, have also independently assisted North Korea by providing over 700,000.00 US dollars during the same period covering about 28 percent of total amount given by the international communities to North Korea. Such international organizations as WFP (World Food Program) and other international NGOs have also assisted a significant amount of food, medicine, and other things to North Korea (83).

The current humanitarian assistance to North Korea is getting harder for various reasons such as “donor fatigue” phenomenon among the international communities, North Korea’s nuclear program, the U.S. policy of war on terrorism, and South Korea’s recent economic struggle and so on. In my view, without some significant systemic and radical changes in North Korea, such as “adopting market economy,” “giving up nuclear program,” or “changing political system into a democratic nation,” it is likely that the continuous and lingering humanitarian crisis would only foster an even more serious and rampant human rights crisis. As time ticks off, more and more, available cards are getting scarce for both North Korea and international communities. Particularly it would be a disaster to those who have already been in much suffering and abuse under systemically dictatorial government.

Political approach to the human rights crisis in North Korea would be established in two directions: “multi-national” approach through the international political agencies such as U.N. and E.U., and “bilateral” or “unilateral” approach by individual countries that concern the human rights crisis in North Korea. There are several ways through which North Korea’s human rights violation can be dealt with in U.N. General Assembly, UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Prevention of

Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the “1503 Procedures,” and UNHCR are common examples. Specifically, in 1996 and 1997, South Korean representative, Nomyung Kong, publicly addressed the issues of North Korean Human Rights at the General Assembly, which instantly invited North Korea’s harsh reaction. In 1994 and 1997, Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities discussed the human rights violations of North Korean loggers in Russia and North Korea’s violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 12 and 13) respectively by passing a resolution which urged North Korea’s sincere efforts to improve the situation. To this, North Korea responded by announcing its acquittal from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Despite North Korea’s emotional reactions to the international political pressure, the international political community should continue its political pressure against the country. The main reason of calling for political solutions is that without North Korea’s governmental concession, no significant solution to the Human Rights crisis can be attained. No matter how effective it is, at the moment, the international political pressure seems to be the most resourceful strategy to handle North Korea’s human rights crisis.

EU’s relation to North Korea is worthy to be noted. In 2001, the official diplomatic relation has been established between EU and North Korea. Since 1996, EU passed a series of resolutions which strategically envision the transformation of North Korea into a country that respects democracy, human rights, and world peace. Since then, EU has continuously requested the improvement of human rights to North Korea. In June, 2001, Swedish and North Korean representatives met in Sweden to have a human rights seminar regarding the improvement of North Korea’s human rights crisis. At the

human rights seminar, representatives of EU and North Korea discussed whether UN's resolutions have been approved and practiced by North Korean government. EU representatives also showed their concerns regarding people's basic rights for freedom, political prisoners' human rights, the lack of information regarding human rights situations in North Korea, and also the difficulties of UN human rights agencies' and NGO's free activities in North Korea. EU continuously raised the human rights problems to North Korea through political dialogues since its signing a treaty of amity with North Korea (Kyuyoung Lee, 43).

In my view, EU's fundamental strategy in dealing with North Korea's human rights crisis is exemplary for our discussion. Since 1998, when the political discussion between EU and North Korea started, EU has continuously emphasized to North Korea that human rights issue was one of the most political agendas that needed to be treated (Kyuyoung Lee, 45). By connecting this political issue with economical and humanitarian assistance and support to North Korea, EU has politically approached to the matter on international level. EU has also brought up the North Korea's human rights issue at UN Commission on Human Rights since 2002 requesting North Korea's sincere and constructive response. North Korea has reacted to this advancement by criticizing it as mere fabrication and invention of EU against its country to use UN Commission for political purpose (Kyuyoung Lee, 47).

Although there is no guarantee that North Korea would constructively respond to the political pressures of world community regarding the human rights violation, at the moment, political approach seems to be indispensable in dealing with the issue because

there is no other option for North Korea but to respond to the political pressure while it is desperately in need of economical and humanitarian support and assistance.

V. Churches' Role in the Global Response to North Korea's Human Rights Crisis

From a political realist's perspective, issues like human rights violation in North Korea cannot be resolved effectively by churches' humanitarian assistance only. This, however, should not mean that there can be no place for churches' role in responding to the one of most urgent and systematic human rights crises in today's world. Indeed, since North Korea's food crisis has been known to the world community in 1995, there have been numerous humanitarian assistances and donations from many individual churches and denominations across the world. Although limited in their political and economical prowess, churches must recognize that church community is one of the most important global organizations that can progressively respond to the human rights violations in the world.

Without doubt, those oppressed in North Korea's infamous concentration camps, those defected in China, and those deserted on the countryside roads in North Korea are the oppressed community in struggle of freedom. Obviously, Churches in North America, Europe, and South Korea may not be regarded as oppressed community being located in the opulent parts in today's world. This is the reason why churches need to learn from Christ Jesus how to become one of the oppressed. Through the "radical identification" with the oppressed by choosing to come into their midst, Christ Jesus has become the archetype, and now Christian churches are summoned to conform to the type through the

“radical identification” with the oppressed beyond their given and taken-for-granted situation.

How can then today’s Christian churches conform to the call of “radical identification” with the oppressed with regard to the North Korea’s human rights crisis? This paper proposes two practical answers to this question: first, the continuous participation in the world-wide humanitarian assistance to North Korean people; and the second, the progressive commitment to a political movement to transform the oppressed system into a democratic community. Christian churches ought to remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill treated, since they themselves also are the body of Christ (Hebrews 13: 3).

Although there is no objective research data regarding Christian churches’ involvement with the humanitarian assistance to North Korea, there has been a significant amount of assistance collected from either local churches or denominational agencies and organizations. For example, PCUSA reported that they supported medical and food aid to children who are suffering from famine and malnutrition with 3,650,000 bowls of noodles during its General Assembly in 2003. UMC has also joined in this humanitarian assistance to North Korea through its world wide relief organization (UMCOR) although exact data is not available. In 2003, Northern Illinois Bishop C. Joseph Sprague visited South Korea and met with Korean church leaders and the former president Kim Dae Jung to discuss churches’ role in reunification efforts in Korea. Korean UMC in US has also assisted North Korea for the past six years with more than 600,000 dollars worth of flour

through the program titled “Oh-Byung-yi-Oh” (which has the meaning of five loaves of bread and two fish).

On a global level, the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC) appealed to the international community to participate in humanitarian aid to defeat hunger and malnutrition in the country. In its Aug 24-7 meeting in Seoul in 2003, the WCC executive committee also appealed to lift sanctions against North Korea. While calling for an end to sanctions, the WCC raised its critical concern toward North Korea regarding the report it violated human rights and denied access to human rights organizations. The WCC’s Churches Commission on International Affairs said also that the reunification of the Korean Peninsula would be a major focus on its work in the run-up to the council’s next assembly – its highest governing body – in Brazil in 2006.

Beyond the humanitarian assistance, in order to respond the human rights crisis as well as humanitarian challenges in North Korea and China, Korean churches in the U.S. and Canada established the cross-denominational organization named KCC (Korean-American Church Coalition) in 2003, and had their first conference in September in 2004 in L.A. Over 1500 pastors and church leaders including Sen. Sam Brownback (the proponent of the North Korea Human Rights Act), Suzanne Scholte, and Michael Horowitz have participated in this conference, and they pronounced the KCC declaration. In the document, KCC made it clear that North Korea’s human rights crisis will be an important agenda of its movement beyond the humanitarian assistance. KCC demands to the North Korean government, “cease all public executions, abolish the system of concentration camps, guarantee peace to your neighbors and freedom for your people,

make every effort to end starvation, discontinue misleading political propaganda and make detailed plans to help your people to live a peaceful and meaningful existence without hunger and desolation.” It is true that Korean American churches have only focused on humanitarian support, which has been severely checked and controlled by North Korean government. Korean American churches are now restructuring their mission strategy in a more progressive way.

VI. Conclusion

North Korea’s human rights crisis has both humanitarian and political aspects. In order to meet this crisis, thus, we have to approach this issue multi-dimensionally. International communities need to continue their aid to North Korea to feed and heal those who are in desperate need and help. Churches of the world should play an essential role by undertaking this important role as God’s mission to liberate those in great suffering and oppression. Christian churches can also join the world wide political efforts to free those who are oppressed in North Korea’s concentration camps and in China by actively supporting international communities’ effort to democratize North Korea in a positive way. In this respect, the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004 is an important political achievement in helping those victims of human rights violation. In joining these efforts, however, Christian churches as well as international community should be careful not to push North Korea into the dead end zone.

To be sure, the purpose of this effort is to bring peace and justice to those oppressed in the country. This purpose, however, cannot be attained from a realistic perspective without North Korea’s sincere and honest response to the world wide effort. The only way to open its crossed gate seems to be none other than the generous gifts

from international community. In this sense, the humanitarian crisis of North Korea may well be understood as an opportunity rather than a mere burden or threat to the world community.

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