

**Panel:** Humanitarian Crisis in North Korea (Lilac/Tulip)

**Date/Time:** April 25, 2012 / 15:45-17:00

**Organizing Institution:** The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

**Talking Points for:** Go Myong-Hyun  
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

As for the topic of my presentation, like Joanna I'm going to focus on the economic system but only the official side of it, namely the public distribution system (PDS.)

The root of the current food crisis in North Korea lies with the collapse of the PDS. I'll focus on the gradual dismantling of PDS not as a chaotic process but instead a deliberate downsizing of the state with the aim of reducing its economic burden. PDS, with its centralized production and distribution of goods, is inherently incompatible with the North Korean agriculture, which is very labor intensive and geographically concentrated in the western side of the country. Yet the distribution of the population indicates that there must be a large segment of the population that depends exclusively on the PDS for food, therefore disproportionately affected by its failure. Moreover, a significant proportion of the population was never properly served by the PDS. This geographic variation implies that the full impact of food crisis possibly differs not only by social class, but also by location. The improvement in the economy will not lessen the ongoing humanitarian crisis in North Korea as long as it focuses on repairing the PDS.

Mr. L. Gordon Flake

In addition to leading the Mansfield Foundation, I also serve as a Vice Chairman of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

Earlier this month, the Committee released the second edition of its report "The Hidden Gulag" and updated version of its landmark 2003 report.

North Korea's political prisons are a difficult issue to address due to North Korean denials and lack of access to the camps. Yet even conservative estimates place the number of political prisoners in the camps at over 130,000 and the camps have now been in existence for twice as long as the Soviet Gulag and more than 10 times as long as the Nazi concentration camps.

Through rigorous research and interviews, this report shines the light on North Korea's Political prison camps. The report makes careful distinction between different types of facilities and provides extensive interview materials as well as specific policy recommendations.

Why Reports like this matter:

- 1.) Most importantly they directly North Korea's assertion that it holds no political prisoners and maintains no political prisons or labor camps.
- 2.) The report specifically identifies individual camps and also humanizes the issue through the marriage of "technology and testimony"
- 3.) The specific coordinates/ information on individual camps can be the basis for international demands for access and information from the DRPK

4.) The report provides a record/ proof of existence for such facilities which may be a deterrence to efforts to eliminate evidence in the event of instability in North Korea

What's New

1.) Information is not static. When the first report was prepared only 3,000 defectors in Seoul, now there are some 23,000

2.) Technology has continued to improve

3.) Recent focus on “refoulment” sending North Korea refugees back in to North Korea which has gained such attention in Seoul.

4.) Biggest difference from a decade ago is the quantity and quality of work being done in South Korea....increasingly non-political and non-partisan.

5.) Potential for increased publicity with new book by Blaine Harden on Shin Dong Hyuk (Escape from Camp 14), Washington Post & Economist OpEd, U.S. North Korea Human Rights Reauthorization Act.

Ms. Joanna Hosaniak

Almost two decades of economic crisis in North Korea caused its people to turn from reliance on the State for provision to other means of survival. The crisis mostly strongly affected people at the bottom level of the North Korean caste system, classified as “hostile”. Whether through the creation of black markets in North Korea or the growing tendency to travel to China looking for food and work, the entrepreneurial spirit developed in North Koreans. The North Korean government tries to hold a tight grip on its population by controlling these activities. At the same time, the State closes its eyes on illegal market practices that affect the most vulnerable groups, like women and children. Because of these entrepreneurial activities, despite being considered the poorest region of North Korea, the Northern Provinces bordering China are the most economically active. It is also the region most easily infiltrated by outside information. In short, the Northern Provinces have the potential of becoming one of the most vibrant regions of the Korean Peninsula. Chinese policies of repatriating North Koreans who are driving this economic development on a micro-scale only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. China needs to change its policies toward repatriating North Korean refugees, which will reduce China’s burden and pay off in the long run.

Ms. Sandra Fahy

She is going to cover children/ orphans/ women - or - refugee/ migration (in DPRK and China)

Mr. SHIN Chang-Hoon

With regard to the current situation of North Korean defectors in China, the applicability of the principle of non-refoulement has recently been a spotlight amongst Korean scholars in the field of international refugee law. Nonetheless, the North Korean defectors have still been categorized as merely illegal economic migrants by the Chinese government.

His talk will deal with the questions that run as follows.

1) Why are they not protected by the international institutions for human rights and refugee

law?

- 2) What would be the desirable role of UNHCR and UNHRC in the protection of North Korean defectors?
- 3) What legal principles and procedures can be invoked for their protection?
- 4) Why do these fundamental questions remain unsolved?

\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

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