



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
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“Human Security in North Korea”

Panel: Session 2 (Grand Ballroom III)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 12:30 – 1:45pm

Speakers: Barbara Demick, Los Angeles Times
Baek Buhm-suk, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Raelyn Campbell, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Abraham Kim, Korea Economic Institute
Greg Scarlatoiu, U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea

Rapporteur: Brian Gleason, Yonsei University

Although Abraham Kim believes that the concept of human security is too unwieldy, Greg Scarlatoiu opened the panel by addressing human security issues according to the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 *Human Development Report*, which specifies seven aspects of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security. Scarlatoiu highlighted a vast array of human security problems in North Korea, such as premature deaths, malnourishment, flooding, deforestation, and violence against individuals from state and non-state actors. He contends that numerous human security issues stem from the “songbun” social classification system, and that the North Korean government should address these issues by taking steps to encourage FDI and allow increased monitoring by organizations like the UN and Red Cross.

Raelyn Campbell surprised many in the audience by stating that “relative to other countries, the health situation is not that bad in North Korea.” She cited WHO statistics revealing high vaccination rates, dramatic reductions in infectious diseases, decreasing child mortality rates, and several other positive health indicators based on WHO data. The North Korean health system is accordingly “dysfunctionally functional,” and needs to build upon its improvements throughout the years in addressing infectious disease control. The Gates Foundation is working on a multilateral, partnership-based approach to address health problems in North

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Korea, although Campbell regrets that “where human security is needed, it’s almost impossible to put it into place.”

Baek Buhm-suk contends that without substantial changes from the North Korean regime there is little that the international community can do to improve human rights in North Korea, and that we shouldn’t assume that the collapse of the North Korean system is the way to bring about positive changes. Since Baek believes that human rights criticisms are too often used from external actors primarily as a political tool to pressure the North Korean regime, he advocates a bottom-up approach to improving human rights via cultural exchanges, family reunions between separated Koreans and frequent contact from the international community.

Since North Korea deliberately seeks to abuse its people, Abraham Kim thinks it’s difficult for external actors to achieve long-term structural improvements in human security. Furthermore, three contradictions arise when attempting to address human security issues in North Korea. First, if external actors endeavor to promote human security in North Korea, they are also perpetuating a political system that needs to be changed or brought down. Second, sanctions against the North Korean regime have targeted North Korea’s foreign trade bank, but this bank also facilitates international funding for the World Food Program and international NGOs, leading to dubious situations in which some European NGOs had to bring suitcases full of cash into Pyongyang. Finally, though South Korea seems to be the preferred actor to spearhead human security improvements in North Korea due to cultural, linguistic and geographic advantages, the legitimacy battle for the Korean peninsula precludes any meaningful efforts from the South.

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