Trafficking of North Korean Refugees in China

Conference on Criminal Trafficking & Slavery

University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign

Feb 23-25, 2006
Satellite Image of North and South Korea

- North Korea - the “Hermit Kingdom”
- Ideology called “Juche”
- Hereditary Stalinist dictatorship – Kim Il Sung, now his son Kim Jong Il, next son?
Starvation in North Korea

Images from North Korea Holocaust Exhibit, November 2004
North Korean Refugees/Migrants in China

- Estimated 200,000 North Koreans in China
- They leave North Korea by crossing the Tumen River
North Korean Refugees/Defectors in China

- To search for food or resources
- To flee detention camps or prisons
- To flee political or religious persecution
Chinese Police Forcibly Repatriate Refugees

- In support of North Korean regime
- In violation of UN treaty on treatment of refugees
- Special units to hunt down refugees
- Bounties are paid for turning in refugees

65 Refugees, 2 Rescue Workers Seized in China

October 26, 2004

Chinese government raided two NK refugee hide-out places in the Tong Chow section of Beijing on October 26th, and arrested (65) NK refugees who were waiting to be rescued and (2) SK human rights workers. Among them were (11) teenage children and (1) senior man aged over 70. Thirty policemen came and arrested the refugees who did not even resist.
Chinese Police Forcibly Repatriate Refugees
Refugees Returned to North Korea
Returning North Koreans are beaten, imprisoned, tortured

August 17, 2005, China-North Korean border, Free North Korea Broadcasting
Refugees Returned to North Korea

Execution of someone accused of being a “trafficker”

March 1, 2005, Yusunnodong District in Huiryong, North Hamkyoung Province, North Korea
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

- Majority are women and teens
- Many are abducted and sold
  - Informal wives or concubines
    - China’s one child policy resulted in deficit of young women
  - Karaoke clubs for prostitution
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

- Women and teen girls are raped by kidnappers, buyers and sellers
- Once recognized as North Koreans, they are powerless
- Any protest or lack of obedience results in being resold or turned over to the Chinese police for repatriation
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

- Hide in the mountains in dugouts or small shelters
North Korean Women in China

- Korean Chinese men hunt for women and girls in the forests and mountains
- Rape them and force them to “marry”
- Sell them to club owners
- 80 to 90% of women refugees are trafficked — leader of the Underground Railroad
- Chinese police are corrupt and collaborate with traffickers
Plea for Help from NK Women in China

“Please help us. Please save us from this darkness full of danger. We are currently living in China risking danger every day. It is not just me alone, but my mother, elder sister, and my elder sister’s 3-year-old daughter. The only crime we have is coming here to find something to eat because we were hungry. What is worse than being hungry is the constant worry and fear that at any moment we might get caught.”

-May 2005
Underground Railroad

- Get refugees out of China to another country (Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam)
- Then to South Korea, although that’s limited
- 50% of attempts fail
- Pastor Chun Ki-won arrested in China, spent 200 days in jail, banned from entering China

“Women are treated like animals. They have no rights. Whoever finds them first can sleep with them. Then he sells them later.” – Chun Ki-won

Pastor Chun Ki-won
Durihana
Seoul, Korea
Trafficking of North Korean Women

- Women and teen girls are trafficked from North Korea to China by traffickers
- Many reports of women and teen girls “selling themselves” to men in China to survive
- March 1999 – 26 year old in detention was executed for “selling herself” in China
  - She “fell under the influence of capitalism and sold herself for money.”
  - Executed in public as a lesson to others
Strategy for Action

• Coalition - American religious groups, human rights, security, social, and civil rights leaders
  – Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000
  – Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act 2003
  – Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act 2005
  – North Korea Freedom Act 2003
  – North Korea Human Rights Act 2004

• Statement of Principles

• Aim: To put pressure on China to stop violating the treatment of refugees according to international law
Strategy for Action: Pressure China

• China pressured to:
  – Halt all efforts to forcibly return North Koreans in violation of international human rights and refugee protection obligations
  – Grant international humanitarian organizations, NGOs, access to border areas
  – **Ensure no public official is complicit in the trafficking of NK women**
Strategy for Action

– Grant all NKs in China an indefinite humanitarian status to protect them from harassment, extortion, trafficking or forced repatriation to North Korea

• Bill is called the “Scoop Jackson National Security and Freedom Act of 2005”

• Mode of action: “limit the total annual value of primary imports from China into the U.S.” if China continues to violate obligations under international law concerning refugees
“Scoop Jackson” Bill

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• Mode of action: “limit the total annual value of primary imports from China into the U.S.” if China continues to violate obligations under international law concerning refugees
“I want to live like a human being for one day. I am a human being. How can I be sold like this? I need freedom.”