House of Commons
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 040 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

● (1310)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is February 1, 2011, and this is our 40th meeting of the 40th Parliament.

[*English*]

Today, Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the situation of North Korean refugees in China.

We have with us one witness. There are three individuals at the table today, two of whom will be testifying on Thursday. While they are at our table, they will not be testifying, and I will not recognize any questions to them. The one witness who will be testifying today is Ms. Hye Sook Kim, who is testifying as an individual.

My understanding is that it is Ms. Kim's intention to spend 15 minutes presenting testimony regarding North Korean political prison camps and then to spend about 15 minutes discussing statelessness in China and forced repatriation.

I would encourage all members and also our witness to remember that we only have an hour, so if the testimony flows over and takes a bit longer than intended, there will be less time for questions. That's just a gentle reminder to everybody.

That being said, I welcome Ms. Kim, and I invite you to begin testifying for us.

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (As an Individual) (Interpretation): Good afternoon. My name is Kim Hye Sook.

I'm wearing sunglasses right now, because in a prisoner camp back in North Korea I still have siblings who are imprisoned there. Because of that, I cannot reveal my full identity to the public, so I have my sunglasses on. I'd like to ask for your understanding for this.

My family was imprisoned in October 1970 in the number 18 labour camp. My grandfather, my father, my mother, my younger brother, and my younger sister were all imprisoned at that time. At the time, I was living with my maternal grandmother, so I wasn't imprisoned with the rest of my family members. But I kept on being bothered by the officials who were in charge of my maternal grandmother's area. They tried to send me to where my family was. So at the end of February 1975 I joined my family in the political prisoners camp. I was 13 years old at the time. I had no idea what was going on at all. I just was forced into this prisoners camp.

What I felt at that time is really something that I cannot express at all. It was just so sad that I had to go in there.

My aunt on my father's side took me to the gate of the number 18 labour camp, and the guards there made sure that no one inside the camp could meet my aunt there. For about three or four hours, I waited at the guards' station, and my mother, who I hadn't seen in five years, came out to meet me from inside the camp. I really couldn't recognize who she was. Her health had deteriorated to the extent that I couldn't recognize her at all. It was the end of February, but her shoes were all tattered. I really couldn't find any words to say to my mother, and I just held her hand.

I was taken inside the prisoners camp by my mother. There were things they called houses, but you really couldn't call them houses. They were just small huts that maybe wild beasts would live in. I saw that my siblings were there. And I had more younger brothers and sisters who were born in that camp.

My grandmother welcomed me by bringing out a dinner table that had food that was not even fit for animals. We had various grasses and some corn mixed together in a porridge. It really wasn't something that I could swallow. It would hurt my throat on the way down. I couldn't swallow at all at the beginning, but I saw that my younger brothers and sisters ate that as if it were a feast. They kept on looking at my bowl, so I just gave what was in my bowl to them.

I asked my grandmother where my father was, because my father wasn't there. They told me that my father had gone out to work at night but he didn't come in the day after or the day after that. I asked my mother what happened to my father and where he was. I heard that in 1974, on December 7, the security guards took my father, and my mother was working in his place on the farms to support her five children and her mother-in-law.

They were very hard times for my mother. The year that I went in, 1975, my mother fell from a cliff as she was picking vegetables in the mountains, and she passed away. So my grandmother and my four younger siblings and I went into the mining area and started working in the mining section of the camp so that we could sustain the family and at least have something to eat. It was my responsibility to protect my family there.

In that area we would receive, per month, seven kilograms of corn. If we dried it out at home, it would shrink to about four to four and a half kilograms. This was for six family members to eat for one whole month. Wherever we went, if we saw anything green on the ground, we would just pick it and save it to eat later on. We spent 13 years in the mining area, working like that and eating like this.

In my 13 years, because of all the dust that I breathed in inside the mines, I developed a lung disease, and it's really difficult for me to breathe. But actually, it was very fortunate for me, because most young men really didn't live beyond 40 years because of all the mining dust they had breathed in.

It was for us very fortunate that we could at least eat this porridge made of anything green that we could find around us.

● (1315)

We saw many public executions, either by gunshots or by hanging, and for us, we were always on the verge of danger and we always had to witness these atrocities within the prisoners camp. In the public execution by shooting, we saw in number 14 camp that there was a public execution going on. Someone from number 18 camp had crossed the river into number 14 camp and had stolen some corn because they didn't have anything to eat, but everyone who did that was shot to death by the prison guards.

We are called “relocated people”, but everyone was in pain and suffering throughout this period. During my 28 years there, every single day I felt that I really wanted to just die and be over with it. All the security guards and everyone there would all be watching us, and we would be recognized as prisoners and relocated people within the prisoner camps, and they would just not treat us humanely at all. Sometimes they'd call us and tell us to get down on our knees and then open our mouths, and then they would spit into our mouths and tell us to swallow their spit. If we swallowed as soon as they spit, then we would be okay, but if we gagged, we would be beaten. Really, in those times I did not want to live any more.

I told you that we picked greens whenever we could, but sometimes we would have some salt and that would make the porridge just a little better, but most of the time we didn't have any salt at all to help it go down. Every month, one person could get about 600 grams of salt, but that too was sometimes not given out. For about five or six months we maybe got about 700 to 800 grams of bean paste, and it really wasn't enough to make any soup out of. It was so rare that whenever we received it, we just ate it as it was. And even though we had that respite of that bean paste and salt, our bodies suffered a lot. Even now, compared to beef and pork, we like it when we have bean paste because it was such a rare commodity in the prisoner camps.

My mother passed away in the prison camp and one of my younger brothers also died in an accident in a mine. Everyone suffered throughout the years. What I felt during that time was that I needed to be released from the situation, but my mother and father didn't pass anything down to me, and I had four younger siblings and my grandmother all to take care of in that camp. So whenever I went out to work, I had to just bear the suffering, just shoulder the suffering.

We were supposed to work for eight hours a day in the mines, but usually we would end up working for 12 to 16 hours. When our shift started we would go into the mines and it was very dusty there, and then after our shift ended—late, of course—we would go out and try to go into the mountains and get anything green that we could to eat, and then we'd bring it down to the mines. Picking the vegetables was another shift that we had to work as well, and all combined, it was about 16 to 18 hours that we worked and we would get whatever sleep we could back in the hut.

Because of the dust we were very dirty after mining, but we didn't have enough soap to clean up, and water was rationed and everyone got three very small buckets of water to wash with. If we used more water we would get beaten. We worked in the mine but we couldn't get any water. It was impossible to wash without any soap, so the miners who worked suffered a lot, and I felt the suffering myself looking at the other people and experiencing it myself.

● (1320)

Public execution was particularly rampant at the time when in 1994 Kim Il-sung died and Kim Jong-il came to power. He tried to replace his father's people with his people, and there were many secret executions and public executions at that time as Kim Jong-il tried to secure power in North Korea. Any disobedience would result in a shooting.

We saw all of this peak in about 1996. There were many bodies all around the roads. At first I was scared, but later on I saw too many dead bodies so it didn't scare me or alarm me at all.

There was just no time or energy for the people to take care of the dead bodies on the street, so a special team took care of them and placed them elsewhere.

At that time people who had served under Kim Il-sung were also sent to the prison camps and they too were sometimes in accidents at the camps.

In my talks about the situation in North Korea, which I give around the world, I always think of this and think that I need to tell people about the situation in North Korea so they have a very clear view of what the situation is like there, and I started to draw a picture of life in the concentration camps.

In Japan there was a person who served as a chef to Kim Jong-il and I showed him my picture about life in North Korea. He looked at the situation there and he recognized one of the people I had drawn. He was previously in the central government and this chef of Kim Jong-il had taken a picture of a person who had ended up in a prison camp and who had died there.

Other people I talked to after coming out of North Korea recognized the people who were in the drawings I drew of the prison camp. These pictures have helped people understand the extent of the prison camps in North Korea, and they too have joined in voicing the message that these prison camps must be dismantled.

During my 28 years in these prison camps I suffered a lot, and for me it's a dream that I've been released and am here in Canada now. Sometimes I can't really believe I'm living this life here.

Until the end of the 1990s I worked in the mines. We suffered a lot until that time. I became a model prisoner there. When you become a model prisoner you are allowed to get married there, so I married a person and registered with the camp and I gave birth to one son and one daughter. In 2001, on Kim Jong-il's birthday, I was released from the prison camp. Until I was released we bred various dogs and pigs and we always gave them to the officials at the prison camp so they would leave my family alone. On February 16, 2001, my family and my younger siblings were all released from the prison camp.

I wanted to escape the society that had caused me such suffering.

● (1325)

When you're released they tell you where your relatives are. So I went to my uncle's house, my father's brother's house, and finally found out why my family had been sent to the prison camp in the first place. My uncle told us that if he had lived with my grandmother instead of my father, his family would have been taken to the prison camp. All this was because my grandfather had apparently disappeared during the Korean War. The North Koreans thought he went to South Korea. Therefore we all had to go to the prison camp. After I was released I was told this fact.

I had one son and one daughter, as I mentioned, and I went to my mother's sister's house in P'ungsan to live. But you really can't live with relatives for a long period of time, so I tried to gain independence from my relatives. I found a small place for my family to live and started to peddle things to make a living for my family. I would peddle fabric and manufactured goods among different towns in the neighbourhood.

I would sometimes go to a different town to peddle things. In 2003, while I was in a different town, a flood swept over the town where my family was living and swept away my children. I searched high and low for my children. I went all around North Korea to see if maybe my children were alive somewhere in the country. I could not find them. My leg was injured in the process, so I could not go anywhere at all. I met a broker who told me that if I went to China I would have food and there would be things for me to do to work.

As to the process of my defection, maybe I should do that in a separate period.

Mr. Kyung Bok Lee (As an Individual): She wants a break, because from now on she's going to tell about her life in China as a refugee. So maybe you can ask questions now.

The Chair: Let's continue with the plan to have Ms. Kim talk about her experience in China.

Mr. Kyung Bok Lee: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): On August 13, 2005, I followed the lady and crossed over into China. We went through Musan and we bribed the guards there. The broker and the guards were collaborating. The guards told me that they would send me over to some ethnic Koreans in China. I'm sure they received some money from those ethnic Chinese, and the security guards, of course, went back into North Korea afterwards.

I changed my clothes completely, once I went into China. I was loaded into a car and was taken somewhere. It was a restaurant in between Zhongping and Houdidong. When I went into the restaurant, I found two young ladies, one was 27 years of age and the other was 24. They also crossed over from North Korea into China on the same night as me.

The next day the ethnic Han of China came to buy these defectors and the two ladies were bought immediately. I was told to say that I was 37 years of age by the ethnic Chinese I was with, but the Han people who came to buy me told the people that I looked over 50 and that they wouldn't buy me. So the next day we kept on seeing people who came to buy North Korean defectors, but they would not buy me.

The ethnic Koreans just put me to work in the restaurant that I was in then and I started working at that restaurant. I was afraid I would get caught by the Chinese police, so I tried to change my accent and pronunciation into the accent of the ethnic Chinese. I worked very well in that Chinese restaurant, so I think they liked me.

They wanted to breed pigs using leftover food scraps. At that time pigs for breeding cost about 15,000 to 18,000 North Korean currency units, but there was a big difference in the price in China. It was much cheaper to get pigs from North Korea than in China, so they sent me back to North Korea to get pigs, so they could breed them at their Chinese restaurant. The restaurant people talked with the security guards and I was sent back into North Korea to go to a market and buy ten pigs to bring back into China.

They sent me over again to buy five more pigs to bring into China. I was about to cross over into China when they sent me back to get five more pigs. There were no more pigs at the market, so I had to wait in the North Korean market. I was caught there by the North Korean security police. There was nothing on my body that could prove my identity at that time because I had everything taken from me once I arrived in China, so there was no way to prove who I was.

I was taken to one of their offices and for one week I was detained for investigation. After that week, I was sent to the safety department of the Musan town. When I went into that safety department, I saw that there were other defectors, two more people who were brought into the detention centre with me. One was 24 and one was 53, and I was there with them.

They knew that I was in another area for a week and they asked us if we had any money. They tried to take any money we had from us. Sometimes they would hide money in the uterus of a woman and they'd take it out by force. In North Korea, the only way you can survive is to have money. I had about ten Chinese bills, and if you roll them up really tight it's about the diameter of your finger. And if you wrap it in plastic, you can swallow it if you can suppress the gagging. I swallowed that money. I swallowed four packets of Chinese money and then I also put four packets through my vagina because I wanted to live.

● (1330)

At the detention centre they tried to stand us up and down so that any money hidden would slide out. But because I had been in the detention centre for about a week before I came to the safety department, they didn't do that to me. The others, the 53-year-old and the 24-year-old who were taken with me to the safety department of Musan, were caught with the money they had on their bodies. All the security officers took that money.

The 24-year-old had her period at that time. In advanced countries when you have your period, you may use disposable pads, but in North Korea you just use cloth because that's the only thing you have. But the guards there were searching for money, of course. I saw at that time when they were inspecting that girl that it really hurt when they were trying to take the money out from the uterus.

Especially when you have something to eat with all that money hidden inside of you, it hurts. So people didn't want to eat, of course. They would beat you so that you would be forced to eat, but you really had to not eat in order to keep the money you had hidden inside your body.

In that detention centre I remember that four times I had to pass stools. In the detention centre you have this partition where you can see the person's head but not the rest of the body. If any money comes out through your stools, the guards of course take it. The smell lasts on the money, of course. But what you do is if you are able to hide the money coming out through your stools, you swallow it again so that at a later point you can still keep it on your body.

On November 3 I was sent to the provincial detention centre. I took the money I had managed to conceal within my body. It amounted to about 47,000 North Korean won. The people at the provincial detention centre took half of that money and I was able to keep half to buy some things to eat while in the detention centre.

I spent three months in the provincial detention centre before I was sent to the number 18 camp once again.

I was of course released before, but then I was sent to that camp again. I was sent there on January 25 of the next year. I was released in 2002, but went back in 2008. Things had changed a bit in the prisoner camp. There were more buildings there. Still, my brothers and sisters were outside of the camp and were able to bring me some food while I was in the camp. I couldn't see the faces of my sisters and brothers, but I did receive food from them. In the 20 days I was in the camp, my siblings kept on supporting me in that way.

Compared to when I was in the camp in 2002, I think the detention camp situation was even more dire. There was one lady I had known from when I was there before. She was about 43 years of age and her husband had died in a mining accident within the prisoner camp. She had been living with a 16-year-old son. Now, this lady, since her husband had died, had to go into the mines to work. She would get the ration of rice for her son and herself. She had gone out to work, but in the meantime her son had opened the rice to eat because he was starving. The mother was outraged and hit her son with an axe and he died. After he died, she took the flesh off the dead body and told other people that it was pork and sold it.

● (1335)

I didn't know at that time that she had killed her son, but later on I heard that this is what she had done. I had received a packet from her that the guards had taken and what I saw was eyeballs that were hanging from some flesh. The officials of the camp saw that. They told me about what had happened in that woman's family. Since that woman was a murderer, she was taken somewhere else. I don't know where.

There were various other incidents like this that happened within the camp. There was a 38-year-old farmer who had a nine-year-old girl who suffered from a high fever. This mother thought that she would maybe just eat her daughter and then kill herself. So she boiled her nine-year-old daughter in boiling water and ate some of the flesh from her body. She had just a bit of salt in her household and she was eating the flesh with some salt. One of the security guards saw that there was smoke coming from her chimney and he went in and saw what had happened. I'm pretty sure that the woman was executed afterwards.

That was the suffering that I saw in the camp. I was sent to a different area after about six months. My leg still was injured at that time so I was sent to help in one of the cafeterias there. I cleaned the restaurant and took care of a lot of things in the restaurant.

One of my jobs was cleaning the restaurant. I saw that early in the mornings and late in the evenings there was no one watching over me while I was doing the cleaning job in the restaurant. I still had some money concealed inside of me, so on March 2, when it was still freezing cold—I didn't have shoes, just socks—I ran away from the camp in my socks in that freezing weather. The socks started to freeze and my feet started to freeze with them.

I ran along any roads that I recognized and I recalled escape routes that people had told me about while I was in the prison camp. I found someone who could go with me back into China, and I went into China once again. Once in China, I was again sold, to an ethnic Korean in China.

I was sold this time to an ethnic Han in China, but I couldn't live there because I was so scared that I'd be caught again. Some brokers asked me if I wanted to go to South Korea. I thought that might be a good idea and first planned to go to South Korea.

I went to Laos to plan my escape to South Korea. We were in groups of six on boats and Laotian soldiers started to shoot at us. The boat that I was on, the people who were in the boat gathered money to bribe the soldiers.

On that boat there was a 43-year-old lady sitting next to me who was repatriated to North Korea seven times before. We had left North Korea in the wintertime, but it was a very warm summer in Laos. So this lady put her hand in the water because it looked so warm and a crocodile bit her hand and starting pulling at her hand. This huge crocodile would not let go of this lady's hand and the people in the boat decided that she needed to be sacrificed or the whole boat would capsize. We kept on riding that boat for about five hours and went to Thailand, and then we were able to escape.

With every breath I still remember my son and my daughter who I lost in the flood. I know that I only have a very short period of time allotted to me, but I'd just like to read to you a letter that I wrote to my son and my daughter who were swept away in that flood.

> There has never been a single moment when I have forgotten you. I'm sure that you too think of your mother and probably are looking for me wherever you are. My life has been painful ever since I lost you. I searched all throughout the country for you, but I could hear no news of you, and because of that I left North Korea. I'm so sorry, my son and my daughter. I'm sorry that I could not find you.
>
> I left North Korea, leaving behind the pain, and I'm so sorry that I was never able to feed you a warm bowl of rice while we were living with you. Every day I cry and the tears flow as I think of you. Wherever you are, I hope that I will be able to join you.

Thank you very much.

● (1345)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Four questions will be asked, one by a member of each party. With the permission of the committee, I think we're going to have to go a little bit past 2 p.m. to accommodate everybody, even if we give you just five minutes to do your questions. I'm assuming everybody will be agreeable to that.

We'll start with Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, let me offer my sympathies for the loss of your family members and also acknowledge my solidarity with you and with all the great people of North Korea who have to endure the incredible harsh reality of living under a centralized militaristic dictatorship that's presently in place.

Your story was heart-wrenching. It was an incredible story. We have felt your anguish and your pain. It is by far one of the most tragic and incredible stories that has come before this committee.

We thank you for being here, and we thank you because we as Canadians and as parliamentarians know so little of what's taking place in North Korea. That centralized dictatorship is closed to the rest of the world, so we need people like you who are witness to the horrific stories that are taking place. Also, your testimony is so important here in Parliament because it allows you to shine a spotlight on the atrocities that are taking place. All Canadians are very appreciative of that information.

I think what we'll find when we leave this committee is that your testimony was the most important part of today's meeting. That's one of the reasons I think it was good that you were allowed to go on, because it was an incredible story. We don't even know where to begin to ask the questions.

You went on about your prison experiences. You've given a really good example of how life is, and it's appalling. But I want to know as well, in these prison camps, is there a separation of children, women, and men? Is there a specific type of treatment that is given to political versus non-political prisoners? Is everybody just put together in a camp? Could you describe that for us further? I'm sorry to have to take you through that pain again, but could you just describe to us more of the details? Canadians want to know generally what is happening because we know so little about that closed society.

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): The number 18 camp was led by the safety department, while the number 14 camp was with the security department. In the number 18 camp, the families stay together. They keep the families together. And there were some people who were high officials in the government. Sometimes they are single, and they have another dormitory for the single people as well.

I lived with my parents within the prisoners camp and the family did stay together. When I gave birth to my child, there were schools and nurseries there. There are schools for prisoners and there are separate schools for the children of officials as well.

Once again, the families aren't split up within the prisoners camp, in the number 18 camp.

Mr. Mario Silva: Did you find that there was a different treatment given to people who were political prisoners versus non-political prisoners, or was everybody treated harshly and badly?

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): In the number 18 camp, it's all a mining area. So anyone, no matter how high an education they've received in the past, just goes and works in the mines. Everyone goes and works in the mines. So everyone usually ends up with some sort of lung disease, and if this lung disease gets serious you're taken out of the mines and taken to work on construction sites or maybe building the houses of officials or repairing the houses of officials.

In terms of a disregard for our dignity, it's the same for everyone.

As for rations, if you work in the mines you actually get a bit more in terms of rations, and people who don't work in the mines maybe receive about half of what people who work in the mines receive.

As for the security guards and the safety guards, in my case, I spent 20 years in that prison without any idea of what I had done wrong to be put in that prison. But even if you just ask, why am I here, that is regarded as a violation of the regulations and it is regarded as disobedience. So everyone just got beaten and in severe cases they would get shot to death. So you really can't ask why you're there in the first place, and it was the same for everyone in that matter. Beatings and punishments without any reason, everyone just has to suffer that.

The officials and the administrative officials in those camps—sometimes we had very young women prisoners who came into the camps, and these officials would of course sexually harass and assault these young ladies. If this was revealed to other people, that young lady would be sent to an even tougher labour camp within that campus. So once again, there was no authority at all of any prisoner brought into the camp. We just had to obey the orders of the officials there.

● (1350)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Deschamps, *s'il vous plait.*

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Sook Kim, I will be speaking to you in French.

First, I want to thank you for the courage you have shown during those years of suffering and great pain. Listening to your testimony, I find it difficult to imagine just how difficult it was for you but, as a mother, I have great empathy for you.

Here, as you sit amongst us, members of the Canadian Parliament, what are your expectations of us? By agreeing to deliver your comments, what do you expect from the Canadian government? Do you believe that it can engage North Korea in a process on the human rights issue?

[*English*]

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): I am past 50 now. I've never heard about human rights in North Korea at all. No one in North Korea knows what human rights are.

Once we arrived in South Korea, I went through their education process and integrated with the Korean society. Of course I tried to hide the fact that I was in a political prisoners camp.

Recently there was an attack by North Korea on a South Korean warship and on a South Korean island, and we now see that there is a need for South Koreans to know better what is actually happening in North Korea. I think the countries of the world also need to know just what atrocities are happening in North Korea as it tries to successfully bring about the third generation of its regime.

As I mentioned, I still have some siblings in the prison camps there, and I cannot expose my actual identity publicly, but I hope that as I tell people about the situation in North Korea, how the North Korean government is treating its own people as enemies and punishing them in such horrific ways.... I think it is my duty to tell more people about what North Korea is actually doing to its people.

I come before the Parliament of Canada and the Government of Canada because what I really would like to do is say that all the rice and all the support you send to North Korea never goes to the people anyway. All the feed material you send for the animals—well, that goes to the people. Feed for animals and cows goes to the North Korean people.

When working in a South Korean restaurant, I saw all the food scraps that were coming out of the restaurant, and I thought if these food scraps were sent to North Korea then those would get to the North Korean people. In the wintertime it's terribly cold in North Korea, and there is absolutely nothing to eat. I am sure there are even more bodies all across the country in North Korea than I saw when I was there.

I just hope that through my testimony here I can help out the people in North Korea in any small way that I can.

Once again, I tell you that feed you send for cattle and for horses and chickens is what gets to the North Korean people when you provide that support to North Korea. You need something in your belly to survive, so I think food support is probably the most important, but we need to remember what kind of food actually reaches the North Koreans.

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: There are thirty seconds remaining.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I will give the floor to someone else.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to take a moment to thank Mr. Lee, the president of the Council for Human Rights in North Korea and a representative of the larger Korean community, particularly in the Toronto area, who facilitated bringing our witnesses here today. I think it's important for us to hear the direct stories, and our sympathies go to Madam Kim.

One of the things in your testimony that struck me, and it may seem a little odd, was that in North Korea you don't have even a sense of human rights. This would probably leave you with the feeling that you're tremendously alone in this world.

I want to touch on some things that Canada has already done and that you may not even be aware of. Are you aware of the UN's universal periodic review of national human rights records? I'll let you answer that when I finish.

In the review of China, Canada recommended that China take immediate measures to implement the recommendations from the November 2008 committee against torture, particularly with regard to the repatriation of North Koreans. The universal periodic review recommends implementation of an obligation under the UN human rights instruments to cease the use of arbitrary detention, labour camps, and collective punishment; to cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council; and to accept the request of the special rapporteur to go into North Korea, to look at the situation, and to report back.

In your testimony you spoke about the executions. I would recommend that everybody see the movie *The Crossing*, which demonstrates how people are treated within China and North Korea, and what happens when they escape from North Korea into China. There's a particularly poignant scene of an execution. One of the things Canada recommended was the ceasing of public executions, torture, and cruel or degrading punishment. Your testimony covered some of the same ground.

My purpose in telling you this is to say that the effort you're making in coming to committees such as this helps to support the views that Canada already holds. We are aware of many of the things that have happened in North Korea, but we certainly are not aware of them at the personal level experienced by you and your family.

I wanted to make that point. I'm sure I've used up a good part of my time to do it, but I think it's significant that the work you're doing balances with the work that the United Nations is doing in the universal periodic review. This committee looked at the universal periodic review of Canada's own human rights record recently too.

I want to reassure you that the attention of Canada is on the situation there. If you'd like to comment further, that's fine, but I don't have a particular question for you.

● (1400)

The Chair: I gather that Mr. Devolin will be doing the questioning.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Kim, for being here today.

I have heard this kind of testimony a few times before from North Korean refugees, and it still takes my breath away when I listen to the experiences that you've had. Thank you for being here today, and thank you for helping us to raise the profile of this issue in Canada and with Canadians.

When I listened to your testimony, the one thing that struck me was that after the horrific experiences you had in North Korea, you managed to escape to China, only to be sent back to North Korea. That's an amazing part of your story. We in Canada don't have a lot of influence over the North Korean government, but we have a working relationship with the government of China. Many of us think that China should treat North Korean refugees differently and better. If North Koreans escape to China, they should be able to present themselves to Chinese authorities as refugees. They should never be made to go back to North Korea a second time.

When you escaped North Korea into China, did you ever consider going to the Chinese authorities and claiming that you were a refugee and hoping that they would help you?

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): In China, lots of police are after you, and I couldn't speak a word of Chinese when I was there. When you see a police car passing by in China.... You see a lot of police going house to house looking for North Korean defectors. People are encouraged to report defectors to the police. They receive 5,000 yuan for reporting defectors, so you really can't think about going to the police for help. You hide in fear when you see police cars passing by. You just live in hiding.

We see the police in China, and when they capture one defector they abuse us verbally and tell us we just cause them a lot more work and we are just worthless. It's their job to catch another defector and send the defector back to North Korea. It makes money for them too, so they would never help North Korean defectors. They would just try to capture us and send us back.

Mr. Barry Devolin: I think Mr. Hiebert had a question.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you for your testimony. It was quite remarkable, I must admit.

Can you help us understand how many people are in a concentration camp like number 18, or in total, if you have some sense? How many people live under those circumstances in North Korea?

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): In 2002 I was released and then I went to China and then I went back, as I told you. I was at the district office as well for a while and I tried to calculate the number at some point. At the end of August of 2002, about 20,000 were being managed in that area; if we exclude all the officials and their family members there were about 33,000, so about 17,000 to 18,000 were in the camps at that time.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Is that just in the one camp you were in?

● (1405)

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): I don't know about the other camps, I just know about the camp I was in. Those are the numbers from number 18 camp, where my siblings are still held. We had about 17,000 to 18,000 people in that number 18 camp.

We could see number 14 camp across the river but we had no idea how many people were there. That's in a different area too.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Do you know roughly how many of these kinds of concentration camps exist in North Korea?

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): After I was released I went around and I saw number 14 and number 20 under the security department and there was number 15 in Yodok and number 20 in Hoeryong.

Then numbers 17, 18, 19, 21, and 22 concentration camps were in the area under the safety department.

That's all I know.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: In your story you talked briefly about getting from China to Laos. How did you get there?

Ms. Hye Sook Kim (Interpretation): On March 4 I left Yanji in China. We don't really know Chinese; there was one person who had only one leg, and we followed him to Tianjin. There were a lot of defectors, about six of them, who joined us at Tianjin, and we were taken to Shandong. There, four more defectors joined the group. By phone calls, everyone was gathered in a group. There were ten people altogether.

From Shandong and Guanyun we went, and there was a bus waiting for us. There was a group of six who had waited one week for us to arrive there. So a total of 16 people rode in a refrigerated truck, sort of like a truck being driven by Chinese soldiers, and we were taken to the border, where we hid in the tall grass until it became dark. We waited for about two hours. The Chinese border guards told us that we should go down a specific path, and that was the border between China and Laos.

We rode eight to a boat in these wooden boats and crossed the river. There were Laotians at the other bank. We followed a small path for about two or three hours into Laos. We came down a mountain through that path. That took about two to three hours.

It was sort of like a desert area that we passed through. It took us about an hour to cross that. There was a huge rock there, a boulder, and we all hid in the shade. There was a boat. Everybody got into that boat. These were speedboats, jet boats, and about five and a half hours later we arrived in Thailand. We were just left off in Thailand. Those boats just sped back, because the people told us that if they got caught they would be imprisoned too.

Once we arrived in Thailand, there was a Korean broker, a woman, who met us there. She instructed us to all go our different ways in Thailand once we had arrived. She told us that if we just said “Korea” we'd end up in the North Korean embassy, so we had to say “San Korea”, meaning South Korea.

We didn't know any Thai at all either, so we just followed those directions. I was sent in a car to a different area. I told the people that I wanted to get on a plane to South Korea. We were told to pay 500 yuan per person. We arrived in Bangkok and went into a special area, a centre, where we were able to ask to be sent to South Korea. There were about 280 people in that centre waiting to be sent to South Korea.

On the boat, the jet boat that we rode to Thailand, I've told you that it was about five and a half hours long, that trip, and it was on that boat that one person was taken by the crocodile.

● (1410)

The Chair: That uses up all the time we have available today, so I'm going to take this opportunity to thank our witness, and also the two witnesses who will be back on Thursday, and thank all members for being here for the testimony and for allowing us to go a little bit over our allotted time.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: http://www.parl.gc.ca

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : http://www.parl.gc.ca