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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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● (1310)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): This is the 41st meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Before we turn to our witnesses, I have a few organizational matters to take care of. The first one is in regard to next Tuesday's meeting. I have spoken to a few of the members of the committee, not all, to suggest that next Tuesday we invite a visiting minister. The Pakistani Minister of Minorities is in Canada and is willing to attend as a witness, if we are willing to have him. That is a suggestion from me. You don't have to accept it, but I'll just ask.

Is that acceptable to the subcommittee?

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Would the Pakistani Minister of Minorities be speaking on our study? We are doing a study that includes Pakistan.

The Chair: Only in relation to his own country, of course, but yes.

Mr. Mario Silva: On the issue of human rights.

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Mario Silva: He's not going to be speaking about minority rights and conditions that we have?

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Mario Silva: Okay, fine.

The Chair: Is there consensus?

Madame, c'est bon?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Yes, Mr. Chair. This is agreeable to me but unanimous consent should perhaps be sought in order to set aside some time for a discussion of our future business. I feel that things are going a bit too fast and there may be some confusion about the issues to be discussed next.

[*English*]

The Chair: Does everybody agree that we should set aside some time to do that?

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Are you talking about the next meeting?

The Chair: I've suggested the idea of actually setting aside a separate time outside our normal schedule to do that. You may recall I mentioned that before the Christmas break. I could actually set aside a meeting for that, if we chose.

Mr. David Sweet: No, it was just a concern that it would take up time when the minister from Pakistan is here, but if it's a separate meeting, I'm fine with that.

The Chair: Let's make sure. I'll ask. Is there agreement to have a separate meeting? We would try to find a time that's convenient for everybody. Is everybody cool with that? Okay. So we'll do that. I'll get back to all of you and suggest a time.

The next thing I want to bring up very briefly is that Mr. Devolin, who is sitting with us today, has a motion that is coming before the House. It's scheduled to come shortly. It's on the subject of North Korean refugees. I'm going to ask the clerk to circulate it so that you can all take a look at it. It's just for your advice.

Finally, our analyst has prepared some information regarding the situation with sexual minorities in Uganda, in particular regarding the recent murder of Mr. David Kato in Uganda. That will also be circulated. I'm not inviting discussion on that one; I'm just alerting you that it will be passed around. It is something that is of relevance to what the committee is doing right now.

That business being dealt with, I want to turn to today's witnesses. We have Dr. Norbert Vollertsen and Mr. Kyung B. Lee. Ms. Kim is back again today. Today the two witnesses will be Dr. Vollertsen and Mr. Lee.

The schedule they've put forward is that Dr. Vollertsen will speak first for 15 minutes on the subject of induced starvation. After that, Mr. Lee will speak. He has a petition for parliamentary resolutions.

Let's begin with Dr. Vollertsen, please.

Dr. Norbert Vollertsen (As an Individual): Honourable Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me.

First of all, I would like to apologize for my maybe poor German physician's pronunciation. Hopefully you can understand. You have a lot of material there in your packages. You can see this is not a garage sale, as I was just asked; these are my documents and evidence. I would like to show them to you. I have so much to tell, but limited time, so I will speed up.

I'm a German emergency doctor—a physician by training. I lived in North Korea for one and a half years. I was a member of Cap Anamur German emergency doctors, and we took care of five different hospitals, ten orphanages, and several hundred kindergartens.

When I entered North Korea I experienced nothing. There were no trees, no birds, no rice, no meat—only a broken, failed state of starving people. When you think about hunger, most of you think about hunger in Africa. It's like Africa, but it's cold outside, like here in Canada right now, and that will kill the people in North Korea—the coldness in winter and no input, no calories, and no heating system. In summer there's diarrhea because of all the bad water. There's contamination all over, and all the people are dying because of spreading infections.

On the conditions in the hospitals, the first Korean word I learned was *obsomida* , "We don't have anything; it's not available." Imagine a hospital without any running water. Imagine a hospital without any heating system and it's as cold outside as it is right now here in Canada. Imagine a hospital without any soap, medicine, and patients. Normally all those buildings were empty. When I arrived there were no patients. What would they do there? Why would they go to such a hospital when there was no medicine?

My main medical diagnosis in North Korea was starvation, no medicine, tuberculosis, and all the spreading diseases. But my main observation as a medical doctor, as a general physician by training in Germany, was that there was depression. All the people looked fed up and exhausted, with no future, no hope for any change, drawing propaganda from early daytime until the evening, with parade after parade. They were fed up, and there's a lot of alcoholism and despair.

As a German it was very convenient for me in North Korea, because I could speak in German without an official translator. There are many North Koreans who studied in the former East Germany. They were trained in East Germany. North Korean doctors with East German accents—very funny. I could speak in German to the professors at the university, sometimes in secret in the evening. After some glasses of beer or *soju* they were quite outspoken about the government. Guess what they told me? They don't like Kim Jong-il. They know that it's mainly the fault of Kim Jong-il that there is no medicine, water, or food.

As a medical doctor it was quite easy to get closer to the people. They always needed assistance, medicine, and friendship. I tried to be different. I didn't want to be like the snobby westerners who know better—especially the Germans. I didn't want to be a stranger. I wanted to make real friendships. It was a huge opportunity to make real friendships.

Because North Korean hospitals lack everything, there is no sophisticated medicine. There is no amputation set, or whatever. They have no treatment for burn patients. Once, a factory worker burned by molten iron was rushed into the hospital. Of course there was no treatment, and he was just hidden in a room. *Kibun*. The North Koreans didn't want us to see that they couldn't treat him. They were ashamed. So I rushed into the room and wanted to do something. Of course we gave all of our western assistance.

● (1315)

But the North Koreans are doing skin grafts in cases like that. They will donate their own skin. It was an unbelievable scenario. The whole hospital, including the doctors, all their assistants, and the nurses, lined up to donate their skin. I thought, hey, that's an opportunity to create real friendship. Let's create a patchwork North Korean with some western skin and North Korean skin. So my colleague and I also donated our skin. Of course, it was a little bit of a bloody procedure, with no real disinfection and no real anesthesia. But we were recognized as friends.

One week later, we were asked to do it again. Whoops, the whole hospital lined up. Everybody was there. We did it again, and there was state television. Now comes the spin, the North Korean spin. There was state media, and then there was the story of two foreigners who donated their skin—wow, what an act—to show their gratitude to Kim Jong-il. It was something like a true tribute. That was the first time I recognized the North Korean propaganda style. Okay, don't worry, forget about it.

We were rewarded. One month later, we were awarded the so-called North Korean Friendship Medal. It is a high honour. We were the first two foreigners who ever got this high honour. I do not care. I'm not the guy who was carrying this around. I was more interested in this one. This is what I call a North Korean VIP passport. It simply says that I got the friendship medal. Together, I got a driving licence. Wow. You know about North Korea. Normally there is a guide, a minder, a person who will check and care for you, a driver. You are never supposed to go anyplace.

I took my chances. Never ask stupid questions in North Korea, I learned. I took my passport, and I went to Namp'o and Wonsan. Of course, if there is a police stop or there are soldiers on the road, you don't go. And I tried. I showed this, and imagine what happened. As soon as they saw this, I could go through. It worked. My colleagues told me it would work. They were from East Germany. They knew about minders and policemen and soldiers. They would never report to one another when there was an incident. So I maybe abused my possibilities. I walked around. I took a bicycle. I took the subway in Pyongyang, and I drove my car all over North Korea. And I made so many observations. Together with my friendship medal I was invited to many, many facilities: to the guest house of Kim Jong-il, to the military parades. I met high official North Koreans. I got the normal picture of North Korea.

I realized that there is an elite in Pyongyang. There is Japanese sushi, Russian caviar, and French champagne for the elite in Pyongyang. I realized that there are Mercedes-Benz in Pyongyang, a lot of them. I felt quite at home in Pyongyang, sometimes. And I realized that there are two different worlds in Pyongyang.

When I came to the countryside, I saw that there were children starving in the hospitals. They were lying there without any food, without any medicine, in a condition that moved my heart. So I was upset, and I thought that I had to change my attitude maybe. You can stay in North Korea for ten years, and you will not get the real picture. Normally you are guided around, and there are all the monuments and all the official tours. And then you will go to a monument and there will be staged things. All the children are lined up, even with a little bit of makeup and some lipstick, and they are cheering, "Thank you. *Kamsahamnida* for the food donation."

I wondered if this was the real picture. Because when you are an emergency doctor, sometimes there are emergency cases, and you have to rush into a hospital with the bloody victim of an accident on your back.

● (1320)

I rushed into the hospital and then there was no medicine any more. There was no food. We had just donated the other day or the week before. I wondered what was going on and where all the international aid was, the German aid, the Canadian aid, the American aid. There were American flags still on the bag. Where was it? Where had it gone?

My colleagues told me, "Norbert, you are an idiot", and they were right. They said, "Norbert, you are so naive". My colleagues were from the former East Germany. They told me that I, from West Germany, had maybe never experienced corruption, a communist state where everybody is going to look for his own. He must in order to survive. They told me this was like in East Germany, a Mafia-style society. There are starving children in the countryside and the elite in Pyongyang, in the showcase city, is enjoying a nice lifestyle. I went, in order to prove it, to the black market. I saw rice bags sold there with the American flag still on them. I saw our medicine sold in a hotel. I saw pullovers we donated, a German donation to the kindergartens. I saw these pullovers sold in a diplomatic shop.

As a physician, you are living there in Pyongyang in the international community. You are living in the diplomatic compound and there are many colleagues from Europe, from the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, from other organizations. I am a general physician, but my hobby, so to speak, was psychological advice.

What happened in Pyongyang was I was often asked for psychological advice. Some of my colleagues from the World Food Programme asked me, when they were in trouble, to get help. There was one guy who wanted to commit suicide because he couldn't stand any more that something was going wrong in this country with the food donation, and he was not able to tell his head office, otherwise he would get in trouble.

There was one member of ACF, Action contre la faim, a French organization. She wanted to quit because a milk kitchen in the north of North Korea was not able to donate milk to the ordinary people because it was forbidden by the government because those people in the northern part were not obedient any more. She was an eyewitness to an uprising. She was not allowed to speak out about this in front of journalists, for example, or to speak out in front of her office back in Paris.

So I was a psychological advisor for some of those people who simply collapsed. They had nervous breakdowns because they couldn't stand any more to lie to their head offices, to lie to the world about what they were doing there.

Only then I realized, after one and a half years, that Kim Jong-il was really using food as a weapon against his own people, so I totally changed my attitude. I thought I had to inform the world about this. I had to take the pictures. I moved around. I took a video, which is also included in your package. I took all those pictures in this book and I invited some journalists for a private tour. When Mrs. Albright was in town, in North Korea, in 2000 she was accompanied by many journalists from CNN, BBC, whatever, so I invited them for a private tour. I had my driving licence. Why not? There were 12 of them, and I guided them around and I showed them the Pyongyang Mrs. Albright didn't see. That was the headline of the article the next day in the *Washington Post*, so that was quite an offence for the North Korean authorities. I was expelled. I was threatened with immediate expulsion, but I was saved by a protest from my head office of the German foreign ministry, so I was allowed to stay.

I documented all that happened then in many diaries. I took many pictures. I took videos and I wrote a protest, a statement of humanitarian principles. I gave it to Tony Hall, a U.S. congressman, when he was in town.

● (1325)

The next week I found a dead soldier in the middle of the road. He was malnourished. He was maybe 17, 18 years old, and he looked like a 10-year-old boy. He was beaten. I am not an expert on torture. I'm a general physician.

My colleague from the former East Germany was a member of Amnesty International. She took care of long-term prisoners in Bautzen, in an East German prison camp. She showed me the cigarette burns and where he was beaten and whipped.

I'm naive, I'm an idiot. I wanted to take a picture and I was immediately taken aside, my camera was confiscated, of course the film was eliminated, and that was the end of my friendship. I was expelled.

In December 2000 I was expelled. Instead of going home and doing business as usual, I went to South Korea. I gave interviews to the journalists. I gave lectures. I wanted to inform the world, mainly the South Korean students, the younger generation. I've written four books so far.

As a German, of course I also know about German history and the impact of refugees. I thought, maybe I have to get the real picture. Maybe I have to go to China. I heard about North Korean refugees. When I was inside North Korea, I never had any idea about refugees. Of course I was never allowed to go to any concentration camps, like the one Ms. Kim was in.

I had no idea. I was naive. I was invited by some activists to go to China, to the Chinese-North Korean border. I met many refugees. I interviewed them. Mainly I took medical care of them, of course, but I also spoke to them. I interviewed them via a translator.

I went to Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand. I gave more and more refugee assistance. I stayed at least seven years in South Korea and Southeast Asia to take care of the people.

I realized that I really do not know anything of North Korea. Inside North Korea you cannot get the real picture. You have to have witnesses like Ms. Kim.

I learned about the power of the media too. I believe in publicity stunts. Therefore we decided how to inform the world. Nowadays the media need a breaking story.

We decided to storm some western embassies. It had worked for the East German refugees in Prague and Hungary, so maybe it would also work for the North Koreans. So we stormed the Spanish embassy in Beijing with 27 refugees, in front of CNN. Maybe it worked.

I went to the Tumen River and saw all these corpses in the river. I saw people who were shot at the border. I was shocked again. More and more I realized that North Korea is a failed state, led by a master clan.

You all know about German history. We Germans were responsible for Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau. Whenever I'm in Washington at the Holocaust Memorial Museum I'm ashamed to be German. I hope that nobody—the students—will recognize my German accent.

After Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, we Germans told the whole world, “Never again”. But it's happening again, right now. Ms. Kim was there. We Germans were accused of failing to act, to speak up, to speak out about the atrocities going on in Germany with the Jews. So I have to talk about the real picture in North Korea. I have to talk about induced starvation, about crimes against humanity, the killing fields of today. I will even call it the unknown genocide, because Kim Jong-il is using food as a weapon against his own people. I can prove that.

I took these images in a North Korean children's hospital. These are not pictures from Auschwitz or Treblinka. This is the reality in North Korea nowadays, in a North Korean children's hospital. You can only imagine, when those are the children in the children's hospital, how it might look in Ms. Kim's institute, in the concentration camps.

Those children looked so sad, so hopeless.

● (1330)

And what should I do? I'm a medical doctor. Should I give some *anti-depressiva*, some injections, so they will smile again? No. I can't.

I have to take a political mandate. I have to change something. Therefore, I'm standing here in front of you, because my own country, Germany, unfortunately does not take so much care. Maybe they simply do not know about North Korea. I'm here in Canada, and I beg you, the people of Canada and the politicians, to do something. The children in North Korea are waiting for your help.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Vollertsen.

Mr. Lee, please.

Mr. Kyung B. Lee (President, Council for Human Rights in North Korea): My name is Kyung B. Lee. As the representative of the Council for Human Rights in North Korea, an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Toronto, I express my sincere thanks to the members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for allowing me the opportunity to present this formal petition. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee.

Today and the day before yesterday, Dr. Vollertsen and Mrs. Kim gave testimony on the horrendous situation that they experienced and that I witnessed at first hand in North Korea: the “worst of the worst”, as Washington-based Freedom House described it. Simply put, the so-called Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a failed and failing state, in that it is not only unable but also unwilling to feed and protect its own people.

It is also a rogue state, in that internally it is perpetrating crimes against its own people and externally is engaging in terrorism and terrorism-sponsored activities, committing acts of aggression, and developing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, threatening regional and world peace.

In other words, North Korea is no longer a state in terms of morality and human security; it has lost statehood. It is still a state, though, militarily and ideologically, with its “military first” policy and *chuche* ideology.

In dealing with North Korean issues, the international community is more concerned about the security issue than the human rights issue. The human rights issue is rather overshadowed, I would say, by the security issue. Rightly so, perhaps, because we tend to take care of our own national or regional security first, before we think of the human security of others.

History tells us that nations that respect the rights of their citizens are less likely to turn to belligerence as a first resort, and vice versa. As the former special envoy for human rights in North Korea under the Bush administration, Jay Lefkowitz, said: with Hitler, Stalin, and others, “the march of tyranny at home was an antecedent to international aggression”.

On the other hand, no two democracies that value freedom and human rights have ever gone to war with each other. The relationship between Canada and the United States is a good example, I think. We Canadians don't feel threatened by the United States, our neighbour, which has perhaps hundreds or thousands of weapons of mass destruction, because the two countries share the same values—that is, freedom, human rights, and democracy.

In other words—and I will quote Lefkowitz again—“Focusing on human rights goes far beyond being a moral imperative”. He says it is a practical means to deal with the security issue as well.

I understand that our Canada has done a lot for human rights in North Korea, multilaterally and bilaterally, such as the co-sponsoring of the UN resolution, participation in the universal periodic review, and raising the issue at the ambassadorial levels.

● (1335)

Today I want to petition, based on the testimonies made, that further studies be made, if necessary, on behalf of the Korean Canadian community in Toronto that Canada do more. Specifically, I want to petition the subcommittee to move a parliamentary resolution on the human rights situation of North Koreans. I think Canada has a moral obligation to do so as an international leader in human rights and as a people's defender of freedom, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law at home and abroad.

Some 60 years ago Canada volunteered in the Korean War in order to defend the same values. The mission isn't finished just yet, in the sense that the northern part of the Korean Peninsula is still not free, not democratized.

North Korea usually snubs a UN resolution, calling it a U.S.-led political plot to topple the so-called highly respected style of our socialist system. Under the circumstances, a Canadian resolution, if passed by the Parliament of Canada, which has no direct military interest in the Korean Peninsula, would have a great impact on the international community and would serve as a huge pressure on the North Korean regime.

As to the contents of such a resolution, we have for reference resolutions the UN Generally Assembly adopted; recommendations Canada urged at the universal periodic review; recommendations the former UN special rapporteur advised; recommendations that the International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees and Human Rights adopted; three private members' motions moved by Mr. Barry Devolin, the Honourable Judy Sgro, and Mr. Peter Julian; two resolutions our council adopted at the North Korean human rights forum two years ago; and our petition to Parliament for the dismantlement of North Korean gulags. I hope that all of these resolutions, recommendations, and petitions are reflected and incorporated into the parliamentary resolution, hopefully to be moved by this subcommittee.

We, the Council for Human Rights in North Korea, would be very pleased to contribute to the drafting of such a resolution, if invited, by making a written submission.

[*Witness speaks in Korean*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee.

● (1340)

The Chair: We have time for five-minute rounds of questions and answers. I encourage members to remember that the period of five minutes includes the answers, so it's always good to have a concise question.

Before we do this, however, I just want to say to Dr. Vollertsen that normally, when people present materials at committee, as they were doing today, we request that they table those materials. If our clerk could contact you after this meeting is over and arrange to get copies of those photographs, we would be very grateful. They could then go into the record of the committee.

Let's turn first to Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, I want to begin by thanking Dr. Vollertsen and Mr. Lee for being here, as well as Madam Kim, whose testimony we heard last Tuesday. I think all of us were very moved by her testimony, as we are today as we continue with this issue.

We want to once again thank the witness for shining a light on a very dark place. As Dr. Vollertsen said, very few of us know what's happening there, and it's intentional why we don't know. The government there does not want us to know the reality, and also doesn't want its people to know the reality.

I'm struck by the testimony and the sheer magnitude of the suffering of the Korean people. My heart goes out to them. We want to know what we can do. At the same time, I want to hear the perspective from Dr. Vollertsen or Mr. Lee, because they know more about what's happening there than we do.

In the last little while we've seen what's taking place in the Middle East. The people there are rising up against dictators. I want to know if there is a sense in Korea of a people's revolution possibly coming up. Was there any group of dissent that you felt there, that people would rise up against this totalitarian regime?

● (1345)

Dr. Norbert Vollertsen: Once in the middle of 1999 I was standing in the front of the subway in Pyongyang, and there was a mass performance, all the soldiers and it was whatever—a birthday of Kim Il-sung.... There are so many festivities in Pyongyang. So all the people lined up, and thousands and thousands of people wanted to go home right after midnight. It was a rush. They all were fed up with this long, long military parade and cheering—orchestrated—so nobody wanted to stay any longer. So the people were pushing forward, forward, let's go home, and then there was, of course, order imposed by the policemen and subway personnel. And all of a sudden there were some fights. Fists and pushing further and then some shouts and then the first bloody nose. And I am a medical doctor in the middle of this. I wanted to help an old lady falling down, for example. And then there was a real.... I had never had this experience; I was feeling maybe like today in Egypt, in the middle of the mob, like Mr. Anderson Cooper here in the middle of the square.

It was like the beginning of the revolution. There were people fighting the policemen. They couldn't stop them any more. They wanted to go to the subway. They wanted to go home. There were soldiers, of course, coming in, and the people didn't care. They ripped off the uniforms, got the knives or whatever, and some...not machine guns, of course. That happened five minutes later. Then there were the guys with the machine guns and then there was order, of course.

But that was my experience. It can happen in North Korea anytime. There are people who are angry about the government. There are people who are very well aware about you. They know about the outside world. They are listening to radios. Whenever my interpreter came into our office, the first thing he asked was if we had some German newspapers and if we could listen to BBC or CNN or whatever, Voice of America, in the morning, secretly. He wanted to get the information.

And guess what? Once I was invited to one of those fashionable dinner parties and there was one high-ranking official. I forget his name. He was sitting there and he told us that of course we know we have to change; we have to get reform, economics and so on, but because of the boycott of the foreigners we can't. But you know what? There is one real natural disaster—and the North Koreans are always talking about natural disasters, flooding, drought, whatever—there is one real natural disaster and that we can't stop. And I looked behind him and you know, in every North Korean room there are two portraits, one of Kim Il-sung, the founder, and one of Kim Jong-il. He looked at those pictures and said "This natural disaster we can't stop". That was his comment on the situation, a high official person.

Some people, as I told you, when they were drinking in the evening—a little bit of soju, a little bit of whiskey, a little bit of beer—were quite outspoken. They told me in the German language that they disliked Kim Jong-il, that they hate him, that they know he is responsible, that they think he is a spoiled rotten playboy and he does not deserve to be the leader of the state. They think he is responsible. And I can give you the guarantee that you will see the same pictures as in Egypt, one day, in Pyongyang. I'm absolutely sure about that.

But you have to trigger it. They need the information. They need the information that you will care. I was told later by East German people, East German refugees, East German relatives of mine, that the best encouragement for the East German movement to freedom was when there was some real support from the outside world, some people who cared, and some people who spoke up against Honecker, at that time.

So there is a need for some government to speak up against Kim Jong-il.

The Chair: Unfortunately, that uses up Mr. Silva's time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Deschamps, you have the floor.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Five minutes is not much when so many questions come to mind.

Dr. Vollertsen, I thought your testimony was astounding. Living in a society blessed with wealth and abundance, I wonder, sitting in this chair, how it could be that there is still hunger in the world and that children are starving when we are able to send ships into space, on Mars and to the moon. I was shocked by what I heard today. The main question that comes to my mind is the following.

Mr. Lee, it seems the international community, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, offered tools and support to North Korea. But being the rogue state that it is, North Korea always rejected the helping hand of the international community. Why didn't the international community retaliate against North Korea, which has South Korea and China as neighbours but still remains a rogue state? This country whose population is starving almost by order of its government, this rogue regime that supports terrorism must be getting some kind of help from external forces.

● (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyung B. Lee: First of all, in North Korea they publicly profess to have a military-first policy. Everything you have goes to the military first. The international community provides aid—clothes, food, or whatever. We send them those things in the name of humanitarianism, but often aid that is received by the North Korean regime becomes military aid. Everything goes to the military first. Nothing remains to go to the suffering people. That is the dilemma. Still, we have to care about the starving people.

I meet a lot of refugees from North Korea, and most of them say we shouldn't provide aid that will be fed to the military. Some say—as Mrs. Kim witnessed the other day—if aid is to be given it should be in the form of food for animals, not ordinary rice, because ordinary people there eat animal food, not ordinary rice. I haven't been there, but I hear a lot about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Does humanitarian help go directly through government? Are civil society organizations or foreign NGOs allowed to distribute food locally to those who need it most?

[*English*]

Mr. Kyung B. Lee: In North Korea everything belongs to the regime. In other words, the people are Kim Jong-il's property. Food, land, everything belongs to Kim's family. So there is no civil society there like we have here. Universities, hospitals, and any institutions belong to the state, and the state belongs to Kim Jong-il.

It's totally different from our perspective. One example: she told me that in North Korea you have no right to commit suicide. In the socialist system the people are fed by the government. If the government is unable to provide food, the people should have the right to economic activity, like trading or farming in the backyard. They don't have that right. They do, but officially it is not allowed.

In desperate situations they decide on suicide and some commit suicide. Suicide in North Korea is a crime against the state. Why? Because human beings are labour. You need labour, not human beings. So as an asset of the state you cannot destroy the asset of the state, your life. If one commits suicide, it is a crime and one should be punished. The people who commit suicide are already gone. Who is responsible? The surviving members of the family. The government doesn't feed the people. They don't have a right to basic economic activity. They don't have the right to commit suicide. The only way one can die is to starve to death. That's the only right you have. That's the situation.

● (1355)

The Chair: Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Lee, we've worked together now for a couple of years on this, and I have great respect for the Council for Human Rights in North Korea, and of course for you in putting forward the ideas you have over the last couple of years. We've worked together on media conferences and things like that.

I want to mention a bill that was put in by Peter Julian of the NDP. And Mr. Devolin has put in a bill. This one called on China to authorize the safe passage of refugees from North Korea through to South Korea, through their territory. We've heard the stories repeatedly of the repatriation to North Korea and what happens there.

Doctor, your passion for what you're doing is very heartfelt, and you're not to blame and nobody is to blame in this generation for what happened in previous generations in Germany. And from what I see here today, you have done yeoman service for the people of North Korea by identifying and putting forward the situation there.

You spoke about the starvation. And because you raised the topic of the previous death camps, is there any indication at all of anything outside of benign neglect? There is no such thing as actual death camps like the previous position where people are going to die there, or a system of putting them to death?

The other thing I'll try to get to as quickly as I can is that you have expectations of this committee. You know from yesterday's testimony that the Universal Periodic Review of Canada did put forward particular recommendations and some substantial ones, I must give them credit for that. Beyond that, the next thing you're proposing is a full motion of the Parliament of Canada. Do you have any way of measuring or knowing about the results of the UPR of Canada? Was there any response over there to that at the time? And what is the expectation for the outcome of our motion?

Dr. Norbert Vollertsen: First of all, I would thank you all for listening. Such a hearing is maybe the first step in doing something.

I cannot refer to the death camps or anything. As I told you, when you're staying inside North Korea you know nothing. You know only what's on the surface. You have no clue about what Mrs. Kim endured. She is the expert on that. I only learned about that afterwards when I met the refugees. But maybe Mrs. Kim can again make some statement about the death camps.

I would like you to have more hearings. We fully respect this motion and whatever is on the way now. I'm happy that Canada is doing something.

I heard yesterday about a new Holocaust museum here in Winnipeg. I was once at the Holocaust museum in Washington, and there was a special exhibition about what's going on in Sudan. Maybe one day there will be an exhibition on what's going on in the Middle East, in Egypt nowadays. Then I had an idea yesterday. Hey, so many students are going through your Parliament on tours. Why not have a special exhibition about North Korea in this new Holocaust museum?

The North Koreans need information, so we went to the North Korean border from South Korea, near Panmunjom. We inflated simple balloons that carried little radios—cheap Chinese productions. The wind was blowing to the north. The people were happy. As I told you, my translator asked if I could give him a radio from China. They are listening to this information. They are needy for information about the outside world.

My dream has always been that what I told the North Koreans when they kicked me out would become true. I told them, “One day we will meet again at the International Criminal Court in The Hague”. Maybe that's also a way. We need somebody who will maybe do the same as was done with Milosevic in The Hague. We need somebody who will make Kim Jong-il accountable. He's still there. He is a head of state, and he is committing genocide against his own people. Therefore, I beg you to do something stronger.

● (1400)

Mr. Kyung B. Lee: Mr. Chair, if I may, there is a movement here in Canada to build a monument. The mission of Tribute to Liberty, an organization to which I belong, is to establish a monument, which is to be in Ottawa.

One more thing I want to add is most people in despair say there is no way to solve the problem, not only because of the characteristics of the North Korean regime but also because they have a good brother, China. We cannot deal with China effectively; it's too much for us.

The world is changing in China and North Korea. There is a new generation in China. I heard that people care now. The younger generation in China cares about how they are viewed by the outside world. Up to now they haven't had that access, but now they are beginning to think of how they are viewed by western countries. That means we have a chance. We can ask the Chinese government to do something about it. If we keep asking them, I think they will listen.

In North Korea I heard from one of the refugees. North Korea depends on the military because the military is isolated. They are so faithful to the regime because they don't know, as they don't have any outside information. The soldiers in the North Korean army now are of the generation that in their childhood experienced the period of starvation in the late 1990s. They knew their grandmothers and grandfathers and parents died of starvation. If anything happens, they can act against the regime, even though they are in the army.

These days we are talking about the Egyptian crisis. There are some similarities and differences between North Korea and Egypt. If you keep a dictatorship for so long, something will happen eventually. In other words, if you don't act to prevent it, the resulting crisis and chaos will be very costly, so we should recognize that.

In North Korea there are many cellphones now. The well-to-do people use these communications. Even high officials are defecting to South Korea these days. The South Korean government does not reveal them publicly because it would provoke the North Korean regime. There are many high officials in the army and in the bureaucracy who are defecting to South Korea. We don't know the number, but there are many.

The thing is the sudden change shouldn't be in the form of an explosion. It should be an implosion. It should be brought down nicely. The international community should prepare for the change sooner or later, and Canada is one of the leading countries to do that.

● (1405)

The Chair: I let that round go considerably over time.

Mr. Devolin, you'll be asking the final questions.

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

I want to thank the witnesses, Dr. Vollertsen and Mr. Lee, for being here today, and thank Mrs. Kim for coming back.

I also had the opportunity to get to know you two gentlemen over the last few months. I have the two questions. First, we're talking about two things: the things that are actually happening inside North Korea, where these gulags are essentially prisons—the whole country is a prison—within a larger prison.... Many of us have wondered what we can possibly do to influence North Korea, either the government directly or the people, so that they can do something. You have given us some good ideas today.

The second thing we talk about, though, is what happens when a North Korean escapes. The obvious and easy place is China, because it's a land border. We've talked about maybe trying to put some pressure or to get China to deal better with refugee claimants and North Korean citizens who escape into China.

When I listened to Mrs. Kim the other day, the most shocking part of her testimony was that after getting out of North Korea things could be so bad in China that she could be forced and coerced to go back into North Korea. That, to me, is testimony to how frightened and powerless she must have felt while she was in China.

My motion and other motions that have been brought forward are more oriented towards getting China to do something, rather than North Korea, because we sense that we might be successful with China whereas we're not going to be successful with North Korea. Do you agree that maybe this is an avenue we ought to be taking as citizens of the world and political leaders, to maybe spend our time focusing on China to improve the plight of those who get out of North Korea, or do you think there is something we can do directly with North Korea?

I'll ask my second question if I have time.

Mr. Kyung B. Lee: I think that when we had boat people in Vietnam there was a program called the "first asylum program", whereby—in Cambodia or in the Philippines—you have temporary shelters to take care of the refugees. From there, the UNHCR can screen whether they are real refugees or not. If granted, then they have a destination, whether it's the United States, Australia, or Canada—a similar thing.

We shouldn't only push the Chinese government to do something about it. We shouldn't condemn them, because China also has some problems with this refugee problem. They are saying that they are illegal migrants. Some are, yes. It's true, so we have to understand their position.

We have to do something to alleviate their burden. The one way is a first asylum policy, so that the international community can organize an alliance or something, and collectively suggest to the Chinese government, How about this? It won't hurt you. It will help you. It will help the people suffering. Also, it will help you, China. Why don't we do the same thing?

● (1410)

Dr. Norbert Vollertsen: I fully agree. We should have direct-to-China refugee assistance.

I'm from Germany, and I saw it work. When the West German government assisted Hungary with opening the border, and Hungary was asked to get a train with all the East German refugees, imagine the train going all the way through East Germany and then ending up in West Germany.

West Germany gave assistance to Hungary to open the border. It gave monetary assistance. It gave logistical assistance—how to organize the trains and whatever. Make China become the Hungary of the Far East. They can get assistance from the international community. Maybe Germany will take in some North Korean refugees, and hopefully Canada and the U.S. or whoever as well. They will be there in a face-saving state nowadays, because so many young Chinese, as Mr. Lee explained, are now concerned about the outside world and the view of the outside world.

The Chair: Okay.

Be very brief, Mr. Devolin.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Yes.

Yesterday we had the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Harper, and in that meeting he essentially challenged us and you to make suggestions and to bring things forward. You've had 24 hours to think about it. Is there something you'd like to put on the record that you think not only we as parliamentarians but the actual Government of Canada can do immediately and directly to deal with North Korea?

Mr. Kyung B. Lee: First of all, we met the Prime Minister yesterday briefly. But I think it is a significant event, really, because it may be interpreted that Canada officially recognizes the status of North Korean refugees. Fleeing North Korea is an anti-state crime. You are executed. You are imprisoned in the gulag. But in Canada, officially, the Prime Minister recognized and supported the status of refugees. This is a significant event. I mean, the effect will be great from now on, because the head of the state recognized our action as quite legitimate.

I think that's the beginning. If we have a parliamentary resolution here in Canada, that's something really significant too. So far the United States has a human rights act. In Japan there was a very brief resolution, and in the European Parliament, yes, there was a very brief one. If Canada joins them....

Canada is different, really, because they say that whatever the United States or Japan do about North Korea, that's a political plot, because they have keen military and economic interests in the Korean Peninsula. But Canada is independent. We are objective. We are only concerned about human rights. So they respect whatever we do, and I think that will work.

The Chair: That unfortunately concludes all the time we have for our witnesses today. We are very grateful to all three of you for coming.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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