

Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Sub-Committee on East Asia and the Pacific  
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ORAL TESTIMONY BY DAVID HAWK

Researcher, US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea and author  
**“The Hidden Gulag: Exposing the North Korea’s Prison Camps  
– *Prisoner testimonies and Satellite Photographs*”**

Senators, thank you very much for inviting me to testify today on the North Korean prison camps system. As you know, North Korean officials continue to adamantly, strenuously deny that they have political prisoners or political prison camps. I hope that my report, released last week by the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea will provide the vocabulary, the analysis, and the modicum of evidence that will enable UN officials, diplomats, parliamentarian delegations, journalists and others to challenge such denials.

Virtually all of the scores of thousands of Koreans imprisoned in the *kwan-li-so* political penal forced labor camps are victims of what the UN defines as “arbitrary detention.” None of those so imprisoned have undergone any judicial process. Most of those imprisoned serve life-time sentences performing slave labor – usually mining, lumberjacking and timber cutting or agricultural production -- under terrible conditions. Most of those imprisoned are there by virtue of a system of guilt by association, in which not only the perceived political wrong-doer, but members of his or her family up to three generations are imprisoned at hard labor. Virtually all of the *kwan-li-so* inmates are political prisoners. Six such political penal labor camps are believed to be operating currently. Eyewitness accounts of four of these prison camps appear in the report, along with satellite photos of these four political prison camps.

The other component of the North Korean gulag is *kyo-hwa-so* prison camps, which like the *kwan-li-so* are characterized by very high rates of deaths-in-detention from combinations of below-subsistence food rations coupled with hard labor under brutal conditions. But the *kyo-hwa-so* inmates have been through a judicial process and are given fixed term sentences. And, the inmate population of the *kyo-hwa-so* forced labor prisons and prison camps is mixed: some have been convicted of criminal offenses: others are political prisoners. Such *kyo-hwa-so* inmates were imprisoned for what would not be criminal acts in non-totalitarian societies. Examples included in this report are those North Koreans imprisoned and condemned to hard, dangerous labor under extremely harsh conditions for singing South Korean songs, listening to South Korean radio, or having met South Koreans in China. The report provides descriptions of seven *kyo-hwa-so* and a satellite photograph of Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province.

Similarly, the shorter-term *jib-kyul-so* provincial detention center inmate populations are also mixed. Some detainees are imprisoned for essentially misdemeanor level offenses. But many others are imprisoned solely for having left North Korea to obtain food or money for food in China. Or having left their village without authorization to seek food in a neighboring area. These provincial detention facilities and the related *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* labor training camps constitute a separate system of punishment and forced labor for North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China.

Each of these different prison-slave labor camps, prisons and detention facilities are characterized by extreme phenomena of repression: life-time imprisonment and guilt by association, up to three generations in the *kwan-li-so*; forced abortion and ethnic infanticide in the provincial detention centers along the North Korea-Chinese border; the practice of torture and extremely high rates of deaths-in-detention from combinations of forced labor and below subsistence food rations permeate the prison and camps system at all levels.

The base of information on which this report was prepared is outlined in the introduction. Still, for some of these prison camps we have limited sources, even single sources. For example, Mr. Kim Yong is the only known escapee from Camps 14 and 18 in province known to have obtained asylum. On the other hand, if North Korean authorities want to disprove the claims made by former prisoners, it would not be difficult to invite appropriate representatives of the UN, the ICRC, or responsible NGOs such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch to visit the sites identified and located in this report. Until such time as on-site verifications are allowed, the refugee testimonies, such as presented in this report retain their credence and authority. Since the North Korean authorities do not allow on-site verification, the US Committee, with the help of the National Resource Defense Council, was able to obtain satellite photographs of seven different prison camps, prisons and detention centers, whose landmarks have been identified by the former prisoners from these facilities.

Finally, may I call your attention to some of the recommendations of the report.

First, I hope Congress will be able to encourage the Bush Administration to increase their satellite coverage of the NK prison camps.

Second, with respect to the situation of North Koreans in China, I hope that the US will speak to the Chinese about allowing the UNHCR access to North Koreans in China, or pending that step, to simply stop the repatriation of North Koreans until it can be verified that the extreme punishments of repatriated North Koreans has ceased. I would also hope that the United States, preferably in cooperation with South Korea and Japan can approach the Chinese about a program of orderly departure, first asylum and third country re-settlement if that is the only way to empty out the North Korean *kwan-li-so*.

Third, as a substantial contributor to the World Food Program in Korea, I would hope that the United States could urge the WFP to offer food support to the *kyo-hwa-so*, *jib-*

kyul-so and ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae prisons and prisoners in order to reduce the number of deaths in detention from malnutrition and related diseases.

Fourth, regarding the present six-party talks with North Korea, I have no idea if these negotiations can or will succeed. Or, perhaps they will be limited to security trade-offs and arrangements. However, if a more comprehensive solution is envisioned or demanded – that is one that includes foreign aid to, foreign investment in, and “normalized” economic relations (opening up the borders of Europe and North America for North Korean-produced goods and materials), then I would hope that humanitarian and human rights consideration would also be put on the agenda for consideration.