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and
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Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I consider it a great honor to testify before you today, but more than an honor, a responsibility. I will explain. I am the President of Concerned Women for America, the largest public policy women's organization in the country, but I come before you today wearing a different hat, that of Chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition.

While most of you were grappling with the horrors of September 11, 2001, I and a few companions were traveling unaware in that dark and isolated land known as North Korea. We had crossed the bridge over the Tumen River by foot under the watchful eye of armed guards the day before, visited their schools, seen their children perform with robotic excellence, entered the presidential concubine's gambling casino and traveled around a "vacation island," viewing herds of seals from a rented speedboat. That's what we were doing as the World Center Trade Towers fell, and it wasn't until 24 hours after the fact, when we passed back across the bridge into Northern Manchuria, that a restaurant owner told us the news. One of my companions from New York City used a satellite phone to call his wife who confirmed the dreadful news.

We were then stranded in Beijing for several days and were finally able to make it out and back home only by going through Japan.

Our journey had begun in China where our assignment was to interview North Korean refugees who had escaped and were hiding in Northern Manchuria. Most of them had fled across the river desperate for food. Much like the famed escapes of the oppressed

East Germans over the Berlin Wall, the stories are legion of the heroism and determination that lack of freedom drives men and women to in this part of the world. The difference in the peoples lies in the end result. For the East Germans, to survive the escape was to be free. For the North Koreans, to survive the escape was to eat, yes...but then to enter a twilight zone of existence that no person on this earth should have to endure.

It is the Chinese and ethnic Korean Christians who greet the refugees with rice and the love of God. They open their homes at great risk, knowing that their own fate will be determined by the dangers they dare to embrace. But they take these people in willingly, sacrificially, and their faith is a testimony to the power of God in the face of abject evil.

I sat on the floor with four young boys and their plump and smiling surrogate mother, in the kitchen of her small home in a village up in the mountains. I said young boys, because they appeared to be prepubescent teenagers, but in reality were 16 and 17 years old. Their bodies were underdeveloped and malnourished due to the famine and the fact that Kim Jong Il routes humanitarian aid to the military, while starving his own people. They were told in school, incidentally, that there was no rice because the Americans had sunk the ships bringing in the food. Three of them, friends, had just recently swum across the Tumen River separating the two countries in a valiant and courageous effort to get food, and in one boy's case, take the enormous risk of bringing some of it back to his starving mother.

The boy who was planning to make that treacherous return trip was animated, smiling, filled with mission and purpose. After telling us that he had learned about God in this loving sanctuary, our interpreter asked if he would go back and declare his faith. With refreshing candor, characteristic of his colorful personality, he said softly, "I don't have that much faith yet." Another one huddled beside me, with the twisted, silent countenance only a trauma victim can display. He talked quietly about their dangerous swim across the river and how in one moment he thought he was going to die...How the

other two boys encouraged him on and how they had persevered to the shore for freedom. Still...no expression...the voice subdued.

The woman who had taken them in was constantly moving about, touching and hugging and feeding them. She was a Christian...one of the band of brave souls who are risking their own lives and well being to help the people that no one wants...North Korean refugees. The boys were not permitted to leave the house...they couldn't go to school...work or play, because if caught, they would be sent back and summarily executed. The Chinese government doesn't want them. The South Korean government doesn't want them, and current U.S. policy severely limits sanctuary here. There is no place to go.

As we tried to leave this mountain hideaway, neighbors came out of their houses, watching, not with innocent curiosity but with the intent of spying and reporting on their rebellious neighbor. We shuddered to think of her fate as we pulled away.

The next day we ventured into a town on the border, and tried, at least, in spite of passing an unexpected prison chain gang, to enter a Chinese apartment discreetly. We quickly climbed the steps to the top floor and entered silently. We were ushered into a sort of family room where five more refugees were sitting, along with the apartment dweller, another Christian and his wife who had opened their home at great peril. Once we entered the room, the doorbell rang and an electric wave of tension surged through all of us. The man rushed to shut the door to our room, another watched nervously out the window, and we felt, in that moment, the dread fear the Chinese and North Koreans live with daily. Our hearts pounded as we realized that it was...a false alarm.

I proceeded to interview two of the refugees. One, a young mother, had fled across the Tumen River herself to get food for her husband and baby. She was aided once again by Christ-followers who gave her rice and a small Bible, after which she made the dangerous trip back with her treasure. She was subsequently caught and put in prison. The hatred of Christianity in North Korea is so great that if you are caught with a Bible,

not only do they execute you, but your parents and children – three generations are slaughtered. She was waiting for her sentence in the prison, when she chose to jump from the top floor, an attempt to kill herself and hopefully save her family. She fell in a broken heap, and was left for dead. But she was not dead. As I sat beside her on the floor, I saw the mangled bones in her feet and legs juxtaposed to her otherwise beautiful body and face. At 24 her life was over. She had lost her husband...her child...she could not leave this apartment except in the dark of night...could not hold a job...no future...no hope.

Next, I turned to a 12-year-old girl hovering on a couch – another child/adult wearing the unmistakable countenance of trauma. No expression...just a deep, deep furrow in her brow. Words, without emotion, devoid of eye contact. She told how for the past several years she had been walking daily up into the mountains, a 10 kilometer walk one way, to spend the day picking branches off trees. She would then bundle them together, drag them back the same 10 kilometers to sell them for the American equivalent of 25 cents in the market, in order to feed her sick father and little brother. Somehow she had escaped, but in the process her little brother had disappeared. It was in reliving that moment that she broke down and could not go on with her story.

When I left that room with those people, fully comprehending the risk they had taken not only to escape but to allow me to come and hear their stories, I vowed to them on that day that they had not taken that risk in vain...that I would make sure their stories were told so that the world could hear.

I was a radio talk-show host at the time, confident I could go back and accomplish that. I was reporting for my new job here in Washington on October 15th, but my plan was to use the two weeks I had left to expose the evil I had seen. Little did I know that my country would be attacked, leaving me and my companions stranded in Beijing, and that that would cut my remaining time on the air so short, I wouldn't have the ability to do what I had earnestly promised.

It grieved me to let them down in that way, but I couldn't see how my duties as President of Concerned Women for America would ever intersect with their need.

Leave it to the gracious God that I serve to find a way. The North Korea Freedom Coalition came about quite unexpectedly, my selection as chairman an equal surprise. But it is a surprise I welcome, and it is with the passion of one who has seen the evil of the Kim Jong Il Regime that I lead and will continue to lead this group.

I lived in Berlin, Germany, during the height of the Cold War, traveled regularly through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin and observed the palpable oppression of the East German people. I have been to Vietnam, China several times, and to Russia before the break up of the Soviet Union. I have tasted and smelled the evils of oppression, but I can tell you that I don't think anything matches the horror of life in North Korea. That is why I stand to speak and, if necessary, shout their cause for them today.

The North Korea Freedom Coalition is a bipartisan coalition of religious, human rights, non-governmental, Korean and American organizations whose prime purpose is to bring freedom to the North Korean people and to ensure that the human rights component of the U.S. and world policy toward North Korea receives priority attention.

We are a coalition of both the ideological left and right, ranging from The Salvation Army USA to the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism headed by David Saperstein, because on issues of human need and desperation, we can most certainly agree.

We are strong supporters of the North Korean Freedom Act of 2003, a soon-to-be bipartisan act that will promote human rights, democracy, and development in North Korea. The provisions contained in the act will provide safe harbor for North Korean refugees, provide ways to get information and food to those starving for both, monitor the death camps so well-detailed in David Hawk's report, and make sure that not one American dollar is spent to build another gulag.

Further, any negotiating with the North Korean regime that says “you can continue to starve and torture your people as long as you dismantle your weapons of mass destruction” is as unacceptable as it is un-American.

And while we wish no harm to our South Korean friends, we also stand to remind them that it is equally unacceptable for them to prop up a regime that is starving and torturing their relatives to the North because the consequences of saving them would be too costly.

We will encourage our government to help South Korea absorb the difficulties that may come, but only to the extent that the South ceases to aid and abet the murderous regime of the North.

Not only are we determined to get information and freedom INTO North Korea, we are determined to get the word out in the West of the brutality and starvation of the North Korean people by their “Dear Leader.” We believe that by God’s grace the net effect of such a movement can be much the same as the fall of both the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall. No shots fired...just freedom imploding.

President Bush has led the way on this issue by boldly and rightly declaring North Korea part of an Axis of Evil. This is no time for the faint of heart or spineless appeasers. This is a time for Americans of all political stripes to unite for a noble purpose: To bring freedom, food and wholeness to the suffering people of North Korea.

Thank you!