

**Protecting North Korean Refugees  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing**

**Representative Christopher H. Smith  
Chairman**

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, Global Health, and International  
Organizations**

This hearing will explore the current situation facing North Korean asylum seekers and assess both China's obligation to protect refugees and the effectiveness of global efforts to stop what the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea called crimes against humanity experienced by refugees.

At a recent House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, North Korean defector Ambassador Thae Yong-ho (Tay Young Ho) testified about the strategic value of both disseminating information into North Korea and the protection of North Korean refugees in China.

Drawing on an analogy about the fall of the Berlin Wall, Ambassador Thae (Tay) claimed that there may be a similar result if China stopped repatriations of refugees and the U.S. and the international community expanded "soft power" news and information flows into North Korea.

As the Congress continues to look at ways to best apply maximum diplomatic and financial pressure on the regime of Kim Jong-un, this hearing will explore the strategic relevance of further pressing the Chinese government to protect North Korean refugees and evaluate the impact of surging outside information into North Korea.

Amid escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, we cannot forget those suffering under the North Korean regime and those North Korean refugees who are in China.

North Korean asylum seekers are at imminent risk of repatriation, torture, sexual violence, forced abortions, hard labor and even execution. China's repatriations

of North Koreans is a stark violation of both the spirit and the letter of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol to which China has acceded.

The Chinese government has a lot to answer for. It is no wonder that the UN Commission on Inquiry for North Korea Human Rights concluded that the Government of the People's Republic of China is aiding and abetting in crimes against humanity by forcibly repatriating North Korean refugees.

- As many as 90 percent of North Korean women refugees in China fall prey to traffickers in who sell the refugees into sexual slavery or forced marriages;
- Labor trafficking is also pervasive. The government of North Korea and the government and businesses in China, Russia, and elsewhere in the world, profit from the trafficking of North Korean laborers.
- In recent months, Chinese authorities reportedly deported hundreds of South Korean missionaries and NGO workers who have provided crucial help to the North Korean refugees in China.

The international community—especially the United Nations, the Trump Administration and the US Congress—must insist that China honor its treaty obligations and end its egregious practice of systematic repatriation of North Korean refugees.

Chinese officials and businesses, complicit in repatriation of North Korean refugees or those who profit from the labor trafficking should be held accountable.

The Congress has given the Administration the sanction tools that if used would send the right message—whether through the North Korea Sanctions Enforcement Act, the Global Magnitsky Act, or those sanctions attached to China's Tier 3 designation for trafficking in persons.

All should be used strategically and swiftly to send a clear message. For too long the world has tolerated China's failures to protect refugees. Those complicit in

the repatriations of refugees and those who profit from the trafficking of North Koreans will be held accountable.

The ending of repatriations should be a bellwether for judging China's willingness to curtail Kim Jong-un's nuclear ambitions.

In addition to the protection of North Korea refugees, this hearing will also assess global efforts to surge news and information into North Korea.

Expansion of existing efforts to disseminate information into North Korea is critically important if for nothing else than to tarnish and undermine the Kim family's cult of personality.

The Kim family cult must be taken seriously as a national security threat and a barometer of Kim Jong-un's power. This cult of personality—sometimes called Juche—has inspired devotion from the North Korean people because of the cradle to grave propaganda they endure.

We must undermine the Kim family cult and the propaganda that grants Kim Jong-un almost god-like status. This status has allowed three generations of the Kim family to starve and abuse the North Korean people and divert scarce resources to the military and nuclear programs.

We must have an information surge into North Korea. Human rights groups are smuggling DVDs and USB sticks with video about the Kim family's sins into North Korea right now. Balloons are launched across the border with promises of a better life in South Korea. Radio programs broadcast daily messages and news, urging North Korea's "elite" to defect and turn against Kim Jong-un.

We know some of these efforts are having effect. We saw several high-level defections of diplomats, military officers, and the families of North Korea's elites in the last year. The number of asylum-seekers, depressed for several years by upgraded security efforts in China, has again begun to rise.

Efforts to get information into North Korea must be expanded dramatically. Washington should be leading this covert effort, working primarily with North Korea defectors groups in South Korea and with other human rights organizations.

The North Korean defector groups should be front and center in this effort—they know North Korea and they know the minds of its people. They know what information is needed to permanently tarnish the Kim family cult and what will motivate military leaders to defect.

Today's hearing takes place amid growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, we must seek all viable options to deal with and resolve the North Korean issue, not only in military/diplomatic terms, but also in terms of human rights and freedom of the North Korean people.

I welcome and thank all of our witnesses. I look forward to hearing their observations and insights.