

Statements for the Record Submitted for the “Civil and Political Rights in the Republic of Korea: Implications for Human Rights on the Peninsula” to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

By Park Sang-Hak

Honorable Co-Chairmen James P. McGovern and Christopher H. Smith, and distinguished Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission:

I would like to extend my appreciation to all of you for granting me the opportunity to submit my written testimony for this important hearing. I would also like to thank the One Korea Network (OKN), for all their help in making my participation in this hearing possible.

I am the Founder and Executive Director of ‘Fighters for Free North Korea’ (FFNK), and the President of ‘The Federation of North Korean Defectors’ Organizations’. I escaped from North Korea in 1998 and resettled in South Korea the following year. A few years after resettling in South Korea, I heard news that my uncles in North Korea were killed after being tortured by the North Korean Ministry of State Security (MSS) agents, my fiancée was horribly tortured for two months, and my cousins became orphaned homeless street children, whose whereabouts are unknown to this day. After receiving this news, I vowed that I would spend the rest of my life fighting to free my countrymen left behind in the prison that is North Korea. For the past 15 years, we have sent information leaflets to North Korea by balloons. As a defector from North Korea, I am convinced that the balloon project is the most effective means to reach my people in the North. They have been “shut out” for over 70 years from receiving any news of the outside world.

The people in North Korea who have received our leaflets and other items, such as USBs and CDs, food items, US dollar bills, and other goods and materials, have benefited tremendously by learning that they had been deprived, abused, degraded and lied to by the Kim family dictatorial regime, with its absolute control and power over the entire population. Kim Jong-un of North Korea was outraged by our leaflets and information, and he allegedly demanded the Moon Jae-in government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) pass a new bill in the National Assembly to outlaw the sending of outside information to North Korea.

The pro-Moon Jae-in Democratic Party (*Deobureominjudang*) in the National Assembly passed the Anti-Leaflets Law, despite strong opposition by the opposition parties, during its session on December 14, 2020. Subsequently, President Moon Jae-in signed the act into law on December 29, 2020, and the law is now effective in South Korea as of March 30, 2021. We firmly believe that this law is unconstitutional and is a violation of many international laws and norms regarding freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Now that this Anti-Leaflets law is in effect, I will be definitely targeted as a criminal, as a violator of the new law, when I continue to send the leaflets via balloons into North Korea, and subject to 3 years of imprisonment and to be fined 30,000,000 Korean Won (about U.S. \$27,000).

Immediately following our balloon launch in June 2020, Kim Jong-un and his sister Kim Yo-jung were so upset that they destroyed the liaison office building at the Kaesong Industrial Complex in North Korea, built by the South Korean government. Kim Yo-jung publicly singled out my name, criticizing our balloon project disseminating information into North Korea as justification for her rash behavior. She threatened and demanded that the Moon Jae-in administration shut down our activities.

Since 2006, Fighters for Free North Korea (FFNK) has sent tens of millions of leaflets into North Korea by air balloons. They have been undoubtedly very successful in meeting the demand for outside news, according to reports from those defectors who have escaped into China and then to South Korea. More importantly, past administrations have never taken actions as the current Moon Jae-in administration has done, in infringing on the rights of defectors and activists to send in outside information via leaflets, and capitulating to the threats of South Korea's main enemy and creating a 'law' that bans leaflet-sending activities.

The North Korean regime continues to harass our balloon project. Twice, in 2011 and 2012, the regime sent specially trained assassins to South Korea armed with toxic biochemical weapons and firearms to kill me, but they were fortunately caught by the South Korean intelligence services. In addition, I receive constant threats to my life and family through emails, letters and packages, and steady stream of propaganda created by the North Korean regime. Now, the government of South Korea has taken the side of the North Korean regime and is trying to stop us by enacting and enforcing this inhumane law, violating our rights to freedom of speech and information.

In June 2020, as the pressure and the harassment by the South Korean government against myself and my organization and three other North Korean defector and human rights organizations began to escalate (including against my brother and his organization that aids North Korean defectors), the South Korean police organized a task force comprised of more than 15 police detectives and investigators, to search my house and office, and my brother Park Jung-oh's office, illegally. The authorities summoned us to their offices for interrogation more than ten times. Presently, we are being prosecuted by the Moon Jae-in government and are awaiting trial.

The leaflets in our balloons inform North Korean citizens about how free countries in the outside world live under free democratic societies and open market capitalism, and we also provide news of the outside world. Meanwhile Kim Jong-un tyrannically maintains his hereditary family dynasty's dictatorship, and its absolute grip over the entire nation.

Sending leaflets to North Korea is designed to open the eyes, ears, and hearts of North Korean people who for too long have not had any access to the outside world. They all need to hear from free democratic entrepreneurs who have prospered outside of the "political prison camps" that the Kim Jong-un regime uses to control its own people, in order to preserve the Kim's tyrannical regime and stay in power.

Our approach and methodology have always been peaceful as we pursue our efforts to inform North Koreans and overcome the restrictions and control over free access to the outside world that the North Korean regime cruelly inflicts on its own people. Because of this project, significant numbers of recipients in North Korea began to understand that they have been abused and dehumanized – and a better life with freedom and without suffering is possible.

The information-dissemination work by Fighters for Free North Korea (FFNK), carried out by sending leaflets containing outside information into North Korea via balloons, can give true messages of hope to the North Korean people whose rights have been violated and abused, and whose lives have been degraded by the totalitarian Kim dynasty for far too long. 23 million North Koreans have been oppressed and restricted and confined for over 70 years. They live in what is literally a dehumanized, giant political prison camp disguised as a country.

As someone who saw leaflets sent by balloons from South Korea when I was still living in North Korea, I can never forget the shock and utter amazement, and the electricity I felt when I saw the eye-opening and amazing information before my eyes in the leaflet I held in my hands. The impact was immediate, as was

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the doubt about what the North Korean regime had been telling me my entire life up to that point. I can say for sure that the North Korean citizens who receive the leaflets sent by our organization, will feel something similar as I did more than 20 years ago.

What is the difference between the totalitarian Kim family dynasty and the South Korean government and its policies? The South Korean government and the National Assembly treat the balloon projects participants, and other defectors and activists who send outside information into North Korea as criminals. The South Korean government has been basically ordered by Kim Jong-un and Kim Yo-jung to block our efforts under the guise of maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula, while ignoring the plight of the victims in North Korea enduring terrible human rights abuses and decades of suffering.

The Moon Jae-in government of South Korea is prosecuting us while we are delivering messages of hope to the people of North Korea, who are seeking the truth about freedom and of the outside world. This prosecution and harassment of North Korean defectors and human rights activists is a part of the growing and worrisome development in South Korea under the Moon Jae-in government that threatens democracy and civil rights in the country.

I have made a legal appeal to the Constitutional Court of South Korea to stop the anti-leaflets law, as this act violates the Constitution of the Republic of Korea and the rule of law for peoples' basic rights to freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

The Constitutional Court at the present time is preparing to review my petition and this hearing in the U.S. Congress through the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission will hopefully have a restraining impact on the pro-North Korea policies of the Moon Jae-in government.

I have been undergoing intense interrogation sessions by the Moon Jae-in government authorities for the past year for the leaflets-via-balloon project I have been carrying out for so many years. The intense scrutiny has caused many difficulties for myself, my organization, and for my family, including the loss of funding from donors due to pressure and harassment against my supporters by the police and prosecutors.

I have also experienced the doxing of my home address, which is confidential information, by one of the mainstream South Korean TV stations. This seriously jeopardized the safety and lives of my family. The South Korean authorities also cancelled my organization's non-profit and tax-exempt status, and my passport was revoked four times – thus barring me from leaving South Korea.

In closing, I will, along with my fellow North Korean defectors and activists, continue to send the leaflets containing the truth and news of the outside world via balloons to North Korea, despite the harassment by the two Korean governments – South and North. We are willing even to be imprisoned, if we can only share the truth of human rights and freedom, and HOPE, with those who need most to hear it.

As attested by the countless North Koreans who have been exposed to outside information, the leaflets inform the North Koreans about the fundamental values of freedom and democracy, and are the salt and light that are a peaceful means to inform them about the truth of the outside free world, and to open up the most closed-off society in the world.

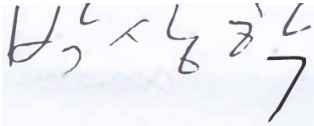
These leaflets are a poison and threat to the regime that seeks to maintain the lies and hypocrisy in order to hold on to its tyrannical, dictatorial power. But to my brothers and sisters in North Korea, they are the messages of love and truth. And for the so-called democratic South Korean government and the National Assembly to stop these messages from going into North Korea and to criminalize our activities – what makes them any different than the totalitarian dictatorship in North Korea?

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The Moon Jae-in government is currently siding with the violent perpetrator of human rights violations – Kim Jong-un, and prosecuting and harassing those of us who are delivering messages of freedom to the North Korean citizens who are longing for the truth. That is why the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the United States Congress holding this hearing is so critically important and is a beacon of hope and encouragement to the citizens of North Korea and to the defectors and activists in South Korea.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your focus and attention on this matter.

Sincerely and Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Park Sang-Hak', written on a light blue background.

PARK Sang-Hak

Founder & Executive Director, Fighters for Free North Korea (FFNK)
President, The Federation of North Korean Defectors' Organizations

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To view attachments (supporting documents) regarding notices to appear for investigative interrogations, notice of cancellation of non-profit status, notices from banks informing of release of financial records to law enforcement, and other official letters sent by South Korean government authorities, the exhibits are available upon request.



Acknowledgements:

This testimony was originally written by Park Sang Hak, Founder and Executive Director of Fighters for Free North Korea (FFNKR), and translated to English by Sin-U Nam, Director of the North Korea Genocide Exhibit, and revised, edited, and translated by Henry Song, North Korea human rights activist and OKN Advisor & Consultant, and by Grant Newsham, President of KCPAC.

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