

# Opening Remarks to the ICPNKR Parliamentary Roundtable on the North Korean Refugee Crisis

July 16, 2003

*Members of the International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Human Rights and Refugees and Members of the U.S. Congress discuss policy recommendations for managing the refugee crisis.*

**Masaharu Nakagawa**, *Member of the House of Representatives of Japan*

I regret very much that I am not able to attend this meeting today. I would like to give a heartfelt compliment to every member of the NED and offer Mr. Benjamin Yoon and the other honorees my sincerest congratulations for receiving the 2003 Democracy Award. I am confident that every one of your activities contributes greatly to encourage humanitarian effort on behalf of the repressed people in North Korea.

I welcome the United States' proposal of multilateral, rather than bilateral, negotiation to deal with North Korean nuclear and humanitarian issues.

In Japan, the abductees and their families issue attracts the nation's attention and has become the main agenda of negotiation between

Japan and North Korea. On the other hand, more and more Japanese people are concerned with the human rights issues of 95,000 North Korea returnees from Japan and their Japanese spouses whose number amounts to 6,500.

It is estimated that there are currently about thirty North Korean defectors in Japan who have escaped behind the scenes through China, Mongolia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. As public assistance for North Korean defectors becomes a widely acknowledged social issue, I welcome new support programs for defectors set up by a Korean organization in Japan.

I have actively participated in the issue as one of the founders of the International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees and Human Rights that was established in Korea earlier this year. I would like to express my appreciation for the tremendous effort by Honorable Hang Wee Yea of South Korea and everyone who have taken part. It is a significant progress for the issue that we now can share the goals and action plans with parliamentarians of the surrounding countries.

I propose a concrete action plan that I would really like to realize with this coalition. That,

1. We urge relevant governments to observe the international standard (The Principle of Non-Refoulement stipulated in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees) and not to deport back the North Korean defectors to North Korea.
2. We call on relevant governments to afford the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a prompt, unhindered

and safe access to the North Korean refugees and asylum-seekers and to afford the UNHCR personnel to have individual interviews with them so that an escapee who needs to receive the status as a refugee in the light of international law may not be dealt with as a mere illegal alien.

3. We urge relevant governments to help establish North Korean refugee camps in Mongolia, Russia, and China-North Korea border region, and facilitate South Korean, American, and Japanese governments and related international organizations to assist the fundraising and the management of such camps.

4. We draft and release a joint congressional resolution proposal and make every effort to adopt the resolution to rouse concern of people in relevant countries and the international community.

5. We establish an international scheme aiming support North Korean refugees and asylum-seekers for the perpetual resolution of the refugee problem in East Asia region.

Finally, I plan to dispatch a joint on-site fact-finding team to the northeastern region of the People's Republic of China with officers of the UNHCR and plan to arrange a preliminary survey tour to Mongolia for establishing a refugee camp. At the same time, I have explored a political route to negotiate with the Chinese government to soften its current rigorous, non-humanitarian policy towards North Korean refugees.

Thank you for your kind attention and patience.

**Hwang, Woo Yea, *Member of Korean National Assembly***

Dear Representative Royce and Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot express enough how meaningful this gathering is, especially for North Korean refugees who risk their lives to find freedom.

The inherent dignity of human beings is the most noble and universal of values, and as such should be the Constitutional cornerstone of every nation. In a very real sense, a nation and the principles on which it is built can be defined as little more than a system to secure human rights. Hence, a nation lacking either the willingness or capability to guarantee these basic human rights should not be considered a legitimate nation in the noblest sense of the word. And those nations where basic human dignities are regularly transgressed should and do face strong opposition from within its borders.

Furthermore, the progress of history has made it self-evident that individual nations must not arbitrarily choose when, how and to what degree they will secure human rights. All nations, linked by their respect for and commitment to human dignity, should be held to account for their human rights record and condemn, and if necessary restrain, those nations where human rights are not respected. With this in mind, it was truly historic that on April 16 of this year Parliamentarians from different countries reached upon a concerted course of action to address the human rights abuses in North Korea.

To avoid the starvation that threatens their lives, many North Koreans are leaving their hometowns, braving heavily patrolled borders to wander from place to place in the lands of adjacent neighbors, such as China. In the face of the oppressive North Korean regime, these brave people are expressing their determined will for their basic human rights.

Sadly, however, if these refugees are caught and repatriated, harsh punishments await them. Extensive jail terms, where prisoners are forced to endure backbreaking labor and regular beatings, are common for many repatriated North Koreans. Pregnant women are at times forced to abort their children. And for those with religious tendencies or those who espouse anything other than status quo political ideals, the penalties are even more extreme--execution and death from starvation and malnourishment are routine practices. It is a transgression of moral laws, therefore, for governments and their police to hunt down and forcefully repatriate these political, economic and social refugees.

Acting to protect the human rights of these North Korean refugees will not only save precious lives, but it will also advance the issue of human rights on the international stage. Furthermore, it contributes to the maintenance of peace and safety in Northeast Asia and enhances hopes of building a stable and peaceful relationship between the two Koreas.

I extend my utmost thanks and respects to all the parliamentarians who have committed their efforts to securing human rights. I would take this opportunity to thank the Senators and Representatives of the United States in particular for their continued regards and support for North Korean refugees. Although I am not able to join you at this time, please accept my warmest regards and those of the many Korean representatives who share the purpose of our cause.

May God bless you and your Congress.

Thank you very much