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**DPR KOREA: NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES -  
AN ESCALATING CRISIS?**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This is WRITENET's fourth report for UNHCR on refugee issues emanating from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK or North Korea). Each is somewhat different in focus. The first, in 1996,<sup>1</sup> was mainly a factual account of North Korean asylum seekers in neighbouring countries: mostly Russia, the People's Republic of China (here referred to as China or PRC), and the Republic of Korea (here referred to as South Korea or ROK). The second, by the present writer, offered a broad overview of North Korea's current condition and prospects as of March 1999,<sup>2</sup> with particular reference to implications for refugee flows - both actual and potential.<sup>2</sup> The third, also by the present writer, was a shorter update as of September 2000; with particular emphasis on the improved international environment and peace process following the first ever inter-Korean summit meeting in June 2000.<sup>3</sup> All these remain relevant, and are recommended for a fuller picture of the overall position than is possible here.

The present report is again mainly an update, prompted by two developments. Over the past six months the international climate has worsened, with North Korea using its mutual mistrust with the new Bush administration in the US as a pretext to break off official contacts with Seoul as well. A dark cloud has fallen on Kim Dae-jung's "sunshine" policy, leaving the South Korean President politically beleaguered. The North's new offer to resume talks may come too late to resurrect last year's euphoria.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, awareness of North Korean refugee issues is rising. The incident of "Gilsu's family", who in June took refuge in UNHCR's Beijing office in a successful bid to win onward passage to South Korea, focussed unprecedented publicity on an issue which hitherto had not had great exposure.<sup>5</sup> All too predictably, it also prompted a crackdown by the Chinese authorities, lest this success should inspire imitators.<sup>6</sup> But this in turn may provoke a backlash, at least in terms of heightened media attention.<sup>7</sup> A revival of DPRK contract labour in Russia, of a kind that raised concerns in the past, has also been noted and criticized as akin to slavery, even in the Moscow press.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lohman, D., *North Korea: A Potential Refugee Crisis?*, WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, October 1996 (UNHCR REF WORLD Databases)

<sup>2</sup> Foster-Carter, A., *North Korea: Prospects, Scenarios, and Implications*, WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, March 1999 (UNHCR REF WORLD Databases)

<sup>3</sup> Foster-Carter, A., *The Prospects for North Korea: Implications for Refugee Flows*, WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, September 2000 (UNHCR REF WORLD Databases)

<sup>4</sup> Kirk, D., North Offers to Resume Talks with South Korea, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 September 2001

<sup>5</sup> Kirk, D., Refugee Aid Groups Say Seoul Is Playing Politics, *International Herald Tribune*, 28 June 2001

<sup>6</sup> Kirk, D., Fleeing North Koreans Find No Refuge in China, *International Herald Tribune*, 26 July 2001

<sup>7</sup> Larkin, J., Refugees in Purgatory, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 September 2001; Rennie, D., Terror Faces Starving Who Flee to China, *Daily Telegraph* [London], 1 September 2001

<sup>8</sup> Whittell, G., Kim Sells Workers to Gulags in Debt Deal, *The Times* [London], 6 August 2001; Startseva, A. and Korchagina, V., Pyongyang Pays Russia with Free Labor, *Moscow Times*, 6 August 2001; Korchagina, V., Serfdom Alive and Well in Russia, *Moscow Times*, 10 August 2001

These two trends may also interact. As noted in our last report, a painful paradox of the sunshine policy was that refugee and other DPRK human rights issues received short shrift. For South Korea, both the tactics and pieties of dialogue (respect for each other's systems, and so forth) prompted a desire to seek common ground and begin with easier rather than thorny issues. Seoul is also at pains not to antagonize China. Hence even Kim Dae-jung, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize as a lifelong democrat, says that "the time is not ripe to raise the issue of [DPRK] human rights yet".<sup>9</sup>

For the US, meanwhile, which under Clinton was North Korea's other main interlocutor, security issues were paramount. Washington's agenda was headed first by nuclear concerns, and more recently missiles; a deal was done on the former, and almost on the latter.<sup>10</sup> So although the US officially noted human rights violations, including refugee issues, it has hardly raised them in its dialogue with Pyongyang.<sup>11</sup>

But the reverse also applies. If the effort to engage North Korea remains in abeyance or definitively breaks down, there is less reason to tread delicately. US Republicans are basically hostile to the DPRK, and in opposition were critical of Clinton's alleged appeasement of Pyongyang.<sup>12</sup> Now South Korea in turn faces a presidential election in a little over a year. This may well be won by the conservative opposition Grand National Party (GNP), which likewise accuses Kim Dae-jung of appeasement. So by early 2003 the political climate around the peninsula could well revert to the hostility of the Cold War era. The sunshine era, rather than a new turn, may turn out to have been an interlude: a brief window of opportunity, which is now closing.<sup>13</sup>

A harsher atmosphere has its own dangers, but may make interlocutors less inhibited in raising the plight of refugees, even if this antagonizes Pyongyang. Even so, *raison d'état* will still set limits. Not only China, but also Russia, will continue to sustain the DPRK so as to avert the risks that would arise were it to collapse - including refugee flows dwarfing any seen so far, a prospect equally unpalatable to South Korea.

Meanwhile, there is little sign that the factors which have driven North Koreans to cross into China in recent years will cease to apply. The DPRK's food shortage looks increasingly endemic.<sup>14</sup> Tighter controls and harsher punishment may check the flows; but they might also backfire. The increasing body of case material suggests that while first time border crossers are economic migrants who simply want to eat, subsequent brutalization of those repatriated by China turns many against their

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<sup>9</sup> Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification, *Peace and Cooperation: White Paper on Korean Unification 2001*, Seoul, 2001, p. 165

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, M.R., How Politics Sank Accord on Missiles with North Korea, *New York Times*, 6 March 2001; Sigal, L.V., Bush's Tough Line on North Korea Is Dangerous, *International Herald Tribune*, 8 May 2001

<sup>11</sup> United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000: Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, Washington, February 2001

<sup>12</sup> United States, Congress, North Korea Advisory Group, *Report to the Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives*, Washington, November 1999, [http://www.house.gov/international\\_relations/nkag.report.htm](http://www.house.gov/international_relations/nkag.report.htm) [accessed 5 September 2001]

<sup>13</sup> Du Mars, R.D., The Deep Freeze, *Asiaweek*, 25 August 2001

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, T. Vidaillet, N. Korea Seen Relying on Food Aid for Years, 21 August 2001

country's regime.<sup>15</sup> While the DPRK remains largely impervious to human rights arguments as such, Kim Jong-il would do well to ponder if he is not thereby sowing dragon's teeth and putting at risk the DPRK's hitherto remarkable political solidity and stability.

The rest of this paper elaborates on these issues. After brief updates on political developments in the past year and the position of refugees, we look at the perspectives and policy choices facing each of the main states involved - North and South Korea, China and Russia, and also the US, Japan, and the EU - and try to predict their likely responses over the next two to three years. As before, this entails thinking through a complex set of relationships - between short and long term effects, politics and economics, domestic and external trends, individual rights and *raison d'état*, and more - in a context where unknowns abound, and the practical and moral dilemmas facing concerned participants, not least UNHCR, are acute. There are no easy answers, but it is hoped that this paper may be of some small help in illuminating, if not unravelling, the political knots that tightly bind the human tragedy of North Korean refugees.

## **2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

### **2.1. Political Developments**

The past year has seen contrary trends. From mid-2000 until early 2001, engagement prevailed. Following the June 2000 Pyongyang summit, the two Koreas embarked on a wide-ranging dialogue: ministerial meetings, family reunions, economic talks, and the restoring of road and rail links across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). In October Madeleine Albright became the first US Secretary of State ever to visit the DPRK. Bill Clinton was ready to follow, but an agreement to curb North Korean missiles foundered on verification problems. The EU and most of its member states recognized the DPRK, leaving only France and Ireland without full diplomatic ties.<sup>16</sup> In May a top-level EU delegation visited Pyongyang and met Kim Jong-il. The ever less reclusive "dear leader" in January paid his second visit to China in eight months: a business-oriented tour of Shanghai which raised hopes that he might at last embrace market reforms. This summer he visited Moscow - by train, taking over three weeks.

But reforms have not been forthcoming; and since March, Pyongyang has used the Bush administration's initial hostility as a pretext to suspend all official contacts with Seoul. Some were already in trouble: the North had hardly begun work on its side of the new road-rail link. However, unlike in past ups and downs, business and civilian exchanges continue. The South donated fertilizer as a goodwill gesture; the North

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<sup>15</sup> See the - overlapping - "Testimonies" in *The Chosun Journal*, <http://www.chosunjournal.com> [accessed 5 September 2001] and "Witness Accounts" at the website of Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights [NKHR], [http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_eng1.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_eng1.html) [accessed 5 September 2001]

<sup>16</sup> For fuller details, see the present author's quarterly updates of inter-Korean ties and annual surveys of North Korea's wider diplomacy in *Comparative Connections: An E-journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/ccejourn.html> [accessed 5 September 2001]. Specifically: Foster-Carter, A., States Stalled: Business As Usual?, Second Quarter, 2001; Will All Things Go Well?Ups and Downs in the New Inter-Korean Normality, First Quarter, 2001; New Millennium, New North Korea?, Fourth Quarter, 2000

responded by sending merchant ships into Southern waters, angering Southern hawks.<sup>17</sup> Kim Dae-jung was further weakened in August, when a few of a group of unification activists allowed to visit Pyongyang expressed embarrassingly pro-North views.<sup>18</sup> This prompted a political crisis, and Kim's coalition partners joined the opposition to pass a vote dismissing the unification minister Lim Dong-won, architect of the sunshine policy.<sup>19</sup> Though this had no binding force, Lim resigned, as did the entire cabinet. As of early September, the political scene in Seoul was one of discord and turmoil.

North Korea's sudden offer on 2 September to resume talks did not save Lim, and it is uncertain if it can revive a peace process which had begun to look doomed. The test will be if the North not only re-opens all the various channels currently frozen, but is ready to make substantive progress: completing the rail link, increasing the scope of family reunions, resuming military talks, and above all proceeds with Kim Jong-il's long-delayed return visit to Seoul. Also, it is not clear if Pyongyang is also prepared to sit down with the US, which since June has said it is now ready for unconditional talks. Jiang Zemin, who on 3 September became the first Chinese leader to visit the DPRK in a decade, will press Kim Jong-il to return to serious dialogue abroad and get on with economic reforms at home.<sup>20</sup> But there is no guarantee that future progress will be more sustained than in the past. (The positions of these various interlocutors are analyzed more fully in Section 3, below.)

## **2.2. Refugees: A Higher Profile**

As to refugee issues, the underlying situation has not changed greatly in the past year. North Korea remains unable or unwilling to feed all its people, prompting thousands - as ever, exact numbers are in dispute: estimates range from 10,000 to 500,000, with a figure of at least 100,000 plausible - to cross into China in search of food or work, especially from the north-eastern province of Hamgyong-pukto (North Hamgyong). Most are thus initially economic migrants intending to return; some go back and forth several times. Their ability to do this varies, as neither government is consistent in how it treats them (except in regarding them as illegal). As throughout the period since 1995 when large-scale movement began, the past year has brought contradictory reports of crackdowns and loosening up, on both sides of the border.<sup>21</sup> Since this summer it seems clear that China at least is now adopting a much tougher policy, both towards North Korean migrants and those in the local ethnic Korean communities in north-east China who help and harbour them.<sup>22</sup> This can only worsen an already precarious existence, with exploitation and abuse (e.g. of young women) endemic.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See a typical editorial in Seoul's leading conservative daily. This Kind of Military, *Chosun Ilbo*, 15 June 2001

<sup>18</sup> A Delegation of Loose Cannon, *Chosun Ilbo*, 19 August 2001

<sup>19</sup> Assembly Passes No-Confidence Resolution on Lim, *Chosun Ilbo*, 3 September 2001

<sup>20</sup> Associated Press, N. Korea Hails China President's Visit, 3 September 2001

<sup>21</sup> Punishment of North Korean Refugees Eased, *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 November 2000

<sup>22</sup> Crackdown Intensified on North Korean Escapees in China, *Chosun Ilbo*, 29 July 2001. See also fn 8.

<sup>23</sup> For a harrowing first-hand account, see Kim Min-Hee, North Korean Women on the Market, on the NKHR website, [http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_eng1.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_eng1.html) [accessed 5 September 2001]. Also

Amid these fluctuations, five trends are discernible. First, harsh punishment inflicted on some returnees turns them from merely hungry into angry enemies of the regime, who escape again and denounce Kim Jong-il.<sup>24</sup> If they were not political refugees first time around, they thus become - or are made - so. Second, there is a greater variety and systematization of lengthy and arduous secondary escape routes out of China into fourth countries like Mongolia and Thailand, where ROK embassies may assist as they dare not in China.<sup>25</sup> Third, such underground railroads are facilitated by a growing network of South Korean and other NGOs, often religious in inspiration.<sup>26</sup> Fourth, despite all obstacles the number who make it to South Korea is growing fast - albeit still tiny by former German or most other global comparative standards.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, all this is gaining wider publicity. The incident of “Gilsu’s family”, for whose successful escape more than one NGO has claimed credit, may well inspire others to attempt similarly dramatic and attention-grabbing gestures.<sup>28</sup> Press and TV coverage of North Korean refugees has increased during the past year, as has the number and quality of Internet websites devoted to this and other DPRK human rights issues.<sup>29</sup> While as ever media interest may wax and wane, it is unlikely to go away; especially since the readiness of governments too to take up this cause will grow, as a fading peace process makes them less inclined to give Kim Jong-il the benefit of the doubt.

### 2.3. Secondary Escape Routes to “Fourth Countries”

Especially for a researcher working far from the area under examination it is not easy to garner reliable information on what, by its very nature, is a secretive phenomenon. However the general trend is clear, as are its causes. North Koreans who have fled to China, but now face increasing harassment there, have three choices. They can risk going home, to an unsure fate; they can risk staying in China; or they can risk trying to go somewhere else, which in the first instance means an adjacent country. South Korea, the destination of choice for many, is only accessible from China by sea, and a few North Koreans join boatloads of mainly Korean-Chinese illegal immigrants. But most, either on their own initiative or increasingly with the help of NGOs [see above], make their way, in some cases largely on foot, out of China in one direction or another.

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Amnesty International, *Persecuting the Starving: The Plight of North Koreans Fleeing to China*, London, December 2000

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 16

<sup>25</sup> Wehrfritz, G. and Takayama, H., Riding the Seoul Train, *Newsweek*, 5 March 2001

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Such groups include, in South Korea, NKHR (Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights), [http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_eng1.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_eng1.html) [accessed 5 September 2001]; in Japan, RENK (Rescue the North Korean People!), <http://www.bekkoame.ne.jp/ro/renk/englishhome.htm> [accessed 5 September 2001]; and in the US, Exodus 21, on which see Kang, C., L.A. Group Helps North Koreans Hiding in Asia, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 March 2001, and, Interview with Douglas Shin [of Exodus 21], *Chosun Journal*, 5 May 2001

<sup>27</sup> The total so far this year is over 300, as against 312 for the whole of last year, itself double the 1999 figure, which in turn was double the figure for 1998. The cumulative total from 1953 to 1999 was barely 1,000. See data in Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification, pp.154 ff

<sup>28</sup> See NKHR and RENK websites (details above in fn 26)

<sup>29</sup> See below, Appendix

At first this flow was mainly southward, despite the long distances and hazards. There are reports of North Korean refugees braving hostile villagers in Laos, and insurgent armies in Burma (Myanmar). Having survived these, they must then contend with local South Korean embassies. One who reached Hanoi was told that nothing could be done there, as Vietnam is a communist country; but that if he reached Thailand, he would be helped. Other than a few such anecdotes, there seems to be little systematic or generic information about the south-east Asian route or routes.<sup>30</sup> But if larger numbers are now applying to UNHCR in Bangkok, this implies that one or more “underground railways”, probably with NGO assistance, are now operational on a regular basis.

The Mongolian alternative is more recent, better documented, and may now be under threat. The physical challenge of the barren steppe, with its extremes of temperature, is no less than the steamy jungles of Indochina. But the distance is shorter, access is easier - a train ride to the border - and the welcome, at least until lately, is kinder. But recent reports allege that both the Mongolian authorities and the ROK embassy in Ulanbaatar have begun to take a tougher line.<sup>31</sup> If true, this probably reflects the usual fears that the trickle may become a flood, with potential adverse social and political implications. It may not have been wise of the Reverend Douglas Shin of Exodus 21, the NGO that pioneered this route, to voice both his dreams of large-scale refugee camps in eastern Mongolia, and his avowed hopes of escalating the refugee crisis in order to force change in North Korea.<sup>32</sup> While post-communist Mongolia has no love for the DPRK, it is anxious not to antagonize China; and as an impoverished country itself, it may fear larger influxes.

Nonetheless, these trends look set to continue. As long as conditions in North Korea go on generating refugees and China keeps harassing them, both push and pull factors will prompt the minority able to do so - young, fit, bold, and/or rich - to try to move on. The NGOs who help them will also not go away, and may well become better resourced if a human rights backlash builds in favour of switching aid away from the North Korean regime (as under the sunshine policy) to its victims. Like squeezing a balloon, if some fourth countries crack down, the bulge will simply shift elsewhere. Thus if Mongolia is confirmed as now hostile, more people will try their luck in Russia. They will not go away - or rather, they will keep on going away until they find a way out, and forward.

#### **2.4. Chinese Koreans: Not So Stable?**

While this report's focus is on North Korean refugees, one must add that their hosts - themselves descended from migrants who crossed the same border from the 1860s onwards, to escape feudal and Japanese colonial oppression and poverty - are also on the move. The two million ethnic Koreans in north-east China, the largest of the many Korean diaspora groups, are no longer the stable community and model minority they

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<sup>30</sup> The best overview, thoroughly researched and with a wealth of detail, remains Wehrfritz and Takayama

<sup>31</sup> As suggested by Alexyss Kim, international campaign officer for Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights [NKHR]. Kim, A., Mongolia Tolerant No More to North Korean Refugees, 30 May 2001, <http://www.chosunjournal.com> [accessed 15 October 2001]

<sup>32</sup> Kang; Interview...



once were. Since China and the ROK opened relations in 1992, many have gone to work in South Korea, mostly illegally. As often, individual gain (itself uncertain, due to greedy or cheating brokers and low wages) is communal loss: villages depopulated, farms abandoned, falling school rolls.<sup>33</sup> This, as well as Chinese state repression, must affect the ability of Chinese-Koreans to aid North Korean refugees. Their fates are entwined in another way: one recent boatload of illegal entrants to South Korea reportedly included both Chinese-Koreans and North Koreans.<sup>34</sup>

### **3. ACTION AND REACTION: FUTURE PROSPECTS**

The rest of this paper attempts to look forward, predicting probable political trends in and actions by the countries most concerned. The three main ones are of course North Korea, the source of the problem; China, as the chief primary destination; and South Korea, the main secondary destination. Besides these, Russia may loom larger if renewed DPRK contract labour once again generates both human rights worries and refugees, as it did in the past.<sup>35</sup> Japan too must be considered, as a neighbour with its own fears and interests. Finally, two more distant powers are involved. US policy is crucial for the peninsula's overall evolution; while the EU aspires to acquire a Korean role, and is the only one of these to attach much explicit weight to human rights.

While most of the focus is on states, it is not intended to reify these, let alone imply that they are or should be the sole actors. To the contrary, at least in democracies the interplay between government and public opinion, often mediated by NGOs, is a crucial factor. Nor can a report addressed to UNHCR overlook multilateral bodies.

#### **3.1. North Korea**

Predicting change in North Korea gets no easier, but at least we can specify the variables in play. So far, refugee flows are generated mainly by food shortages. Two things might ease these: better harvests, or failing that increased aid (and more equal distribution thereof). The former requires not only more clement weather than the run of flood and drought in recent years, but also structural reforms in farming without which output will remain low and vulnerability to natural disasters high.<sup>36</sup> Despite a de facto growing marketization of the rural economy, continuing refusal to officially embrace reform, as happened in China, means that its transformative potential is limited. Many analysts doubt if North Korea - the hillier and colder half of a divided land - can ever be self-sufficient in food, or should even try.<sup>37</sup> But the rational option,

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<sup>33</sup> Leaving Collapsing Communities Heading for Money in Korea, *Hankyore Shinmun* [Seoul], 5 January 2001

<sup>34</sup> 108 Illegal Entrants Including NK Defectors Disappeared, *Donga Ilbo*, 2 July 2000

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, *Democratic People's Republic of Korea / Russian Federation: Pursuit, Intimidation and Abuse of North Korean Refugees and Workers*, London, September 1996. See also fn 9

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Bertini, WFP's executive director, recently acknowledged the structural aspect. See fn 15

<sup>37</sup> Noland, M., *Avoiding the Apocalypse: Economic Turmoil on the Korean Peninsula*, Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 2000

to export manufactured goods and import food, again means a commitment to economic reform which Kim Jong-il, despite hints, appears reluctant to make.<sup>38</sup>

If the DPRK cannot feed itself, will others continue to feed it? Remarkably, the World Food Program's operation in North Korea is its largest anywhere. Remarkably too, so far its appeals have largely been met. Yet donor fatigue, seen in failure to fund UNDP's AREP programme for rehabilitation, may well grow if major donors like South Korea and the US feel the political objectives of their aid, to promote détente, are not being met. Then again, the grain purchases required by aid help farmers in both countries; which is one reason why US donations via WFP have continued under Bush.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the argument made forcefully by Médecins Sans Frontières, that aid merely props up a vile regime which is itself the problem, could in future come to appeal to disillusioned governments as well as NGOs.<sup>40</sup> But even in that event China will go on sending grain and other aid, albeit not generously. All in all, the DPRK's food supply in the next few years seems unlikely to differ much from the recent past. Immediate prospects are generally seen as bad, after both drought and floods this year; although a leading South Korean maize expert and regular visitor to the North is optimistic.<sup>41</sup>

But refugee flows depend on political as well as economic factors: specifically, on the attitude and capacity of the DPRK state. Policing the Tumen river border is not easy, and guards can often be bribed. Then Pyongyang, like Beijing, must make a political decision on how hard it tries to stop or catch migrants, and how it then treats them. Those who have contacted South Koreans or missionaries tend to suffer worst, while teenage children may get off with a caution. There is also periodic easing and tightening of the whole system, presumably in response to political orders from the centre - or power struggles between different agencies. Importantly, the latter is one way in which the North Korean system is not entirely monolithic.<sup>42</sup>

Nor is it wholly impermeable to pressure.<sup>43</sup> This year the DPRK submitted its first human rights report for 16 years to a UN committee, which was unimpressed.<sup>44</sup> Sharp

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<sup>38</sup> Kim Jong-il's visit to Shanghai in January, and some pragmatic new year maxims attributed to him, hinted at reform. See Kim Jong Il Pays Unofficial Visit to China, and, Kim Jong Il Stresses Economic Renovation with New Thinking, *People's Korea*, 25 January 2001, translating remarks published in *Rodong Sinmun*, daily paper of the DPRK's ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP), 4 January 2001

<sup>39</sup> For a recent ROK instance, see S. Korea Mulls Provision of Excess Rice to NK, *Korea Times*, 26 August 2001

<sup>40</sup> Terry, F., Feeding the Dictator, *The Guardian* [London], 6 August 2001

<sup>41</sup> Agence France Presse, Flood, Drought Will Again Hamper North Korean Harvest, 6 August 2001, quoting WFP. Contrast Crop Yield in North Korea to Hit Record High, *Korea Times*, 25 August 2001, citing Dr Kim Soon-kwon of the International Corn Foundation. Dr Kim seems to be in the minority, but after 20 visits to the DPRK, where he runs an active programme, he is no amateur.

<sup>42</sup> Political Security Bureau Acts as Secret Inspector-General, *Chosun Ilbo*, 27 May 2001. See also the section, The Authority of the Military and Security Greatly Weakened, in Kim Young Jun (pseudonym), March 2001: Lives of the People in Chongjin, *Keys Quarterly* [Seoul], Vol. 5, Summer 2001, pp. 54 ff. But Ahn Chol, a young refugee who with help from RENK has twice returned to film secretly inside North Korea, has a contrasting view: "the complete revival of the secret police", Lee Young-hwa, Ahn Chol's Most Recent Video Coverage of North Korea, [http://www.bekkoame.ne.jp/ro/renk/ahnochol/ahnochol\\_e.htm](http://www.bekkoame.ne.jp/ro/renk/ahnochol/ahnochol_e.htm) [accessed 10 September 2001]

<sup>43</sup> This may explain a rare reference in the Pyongyang press to refugee issues: global, not local. Serious Problems of World Refugees, *Rodong Sinmun*, 16 July 2001, reported in *JoongAng Ilbo*, 30 July 2001

questions may discourage any repetition. Some EU states have begun a human rights dialogue with Pyongyang. Yet it shows no sign of liberalizing politically, even to the degree that China has. On the contrary, it may be tightening ideological control.<sup>45</sup> Not that such efforts will inevitably succeed. Despite North Korea's enduring against expectations when other communist regimes crumbled, its stability or even survival are not foreordained. Recent reports of a miners' strike in North Hamgyong suggest that unrest cannot be ruled out.<sup>46</sup> In that context, Kim Jong-il should ponder whether it is wise to sow dragon's teeth by brutalizing refugees, which risks turning hungry but loyal or quietist subjects into fierce enemies of his rule. In the long run a collapse scenario, as in Germany, cannot be ruled out; though the spectre of far larger refugee flows, among other risks, is why both South Korea and China will seek to avoid this.<sup>47</sup>

There is also intra-elite dissent. In Pyongyang as in Seoul, hawks and doves argue it out (albeit not in public), with Kim Jong-il not firmly committed to either camp.<sup>48</sup> For now, Kim's rule as such seems secure. Next February he turns 60. The hope is that this will be the occasion for a long overdue Party congress, which will proclaim a definitive turn to opening and reform. But the fear is that it will just be yet another extravaganza by a regime which will remain a menace at home and abroad.

### 3.2. China

In happier days, Sino-North Korean comradeship was described as being "like lips and teeth". Despite the formal warmth of Jiang Zemin's visit, and Kim Jong-il's two trips to China in under a year, the teeth are now gritted. The DPRK causes China many headaches, yet it is also indispensable. Problems include Kim Jong-il's missile ambitions, such as a 1998 rocket launch over Japan which was a major reason for the US push for a national missile defence (NMD); its dire economy as a result of refusing reform, requiring endless aid; and of course the refugee situation, which destabilizes a sensitive frontier area while earning brickbats for Beijing when it cracks down.

On the other hand, North Korea is also a buffer state without which the US troops in South Korea could be on China's very borders. Having finally won the long rivalry with Moscow for primacy in Pyongyang when the USSR collapsed, Beijing will not throw that card away; especially as it manages skilfully to combine this with a new but much more thriving relationship with Seoul. So China will keep North Korea on life-support, whether or not Kim Jong-il heeds its urgent advice to change.

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<sup>44</sup> Waddington, R., N. Korea Defends Rights Record at U.N., *Japan Today*, 20 July 2001; Kim Mee-Young, Material Evidence Critical for North Korean Human Rights, *Chosun Ilbo*, 5 August 2001

<sup>45</sup> Ideology Education Intensified in N.K. in Fear of Outside World, *JoongAng Ilbo*, 29 August 2001

<sup>46</sup> N.K. Workers May've Gone for Strike, *JoongAng Ilbo*, 28 August 2001

<sup>47</sup> On collapse and other scenarios, see the present author's 1999 WRITENET report, Ch. 4, and references therein

<sup>48</sup> For a dramatic report alleging that party secretary Kim Yong-sun, who is associated with dialogue with South Korea, was briefly arrested in March this year, see B. Choi (Choi Won-ki), Special: Dissension On [sic] NK Ranks, *JoongAng Ilbo*, 20 August 2001, translated from *Wolgan JoongAng*, August 2001

In this context, what are the prospects for pressing China on North Korean refugees? It should be tried anyway, on legal and humanitarian grounds. The PRC should allow UNHCR into border areas, and accept (as it has never yet done) the designation of at least some DPRK fugitives as bona fide refugees. China's desire for global status, as in joining the WTO and hosting the 2008 Olympics, should be leveraged if possible. Yet it is hard to expect much success. The Falun Gong crackdown shows a disregard for international concern and humanitarian norms alike. Border areas are especially sensitive; witness Tibet and Xinjiang. Above all, China fears that any encouragement of refugees will destabilize the DPRK and open the floodgates. Still, the point should be put that brutalization may prove just as destabilizing, as well as being inhumane.

### 3.3. South Korea

South Korea's position is complex. The ROK constitution proclaims jurisdiction over the whole peninsula, and the Constitutional Court has interpreted this to mean that North Koreans are ROK citizens as of right.<sup>49</sup> Until recently the DPRK's tight controls kept numbers small, and the impermeability of the DMZ - the world's most heavily armed frontier, despite its name - means that only a handful ever come by that route.

The larger numbers entering China from the mid-1990s posed a new challenge. Most do not seek to go to South Korea, at least initially; but those who try get scant official help, for three reasons. The ROK and PRC only established diplomatic ties in 1992, and Seoul is keen to keep Beijing onside as regards North Korea; so it treads carefully on sensitive issues. Refugees must often make arduous journeys to fourth countries like Mongolia and Thailand before ROK embassies will help them (and some refuse even then).<sup>50</sup> A second reason is a fear shared with China: that too soft a stance might turn the trickle into a deluge, destabilizing the region and overwhelming Seoul's meagre resettlement facilities. Thirdly, Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy entails a reluctance to antagonize the DPRK; so human rights issues are not on the agenda, for now.

That may change. In December 2002 South Korea will elect a new president, to take office in February 2003. Kim Dae-jung cannot run again. A backlash against North Korea, and on other issues like economic restructuring, means that the conservative opposition Grand National Party (GNP) may well return to power. In opposition, the GNP leader Lee Hoi-chang attacks sunshine as appeasement, *inter alia* for neglecting human rights. What he would do in power is less clear, as two of the above three reasons - fear of a deluge, and of offending China - will still apply. Hence a change of government in Seoul may not necessarily alter the approach to refugees. (Our topic here is North Korean refugees, but the ROK is even less kind to non-Koreans, and is among the countries in the world with the lowest proportion of refugees in relation to its population.)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Article 3 of the ROK Constitution reads: "The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands". Full text in Sung Chul Yang, p. 934 ff

<sup>50</sup> Larkin, fn 1; NKHR, Activity News April-June 2001, [http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_eng1.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_eng1.html) [accessed 5 September 2001]

<sup>51</sup> See United States Committee for Refugees, *Current Report on South Korea*, [http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/easia\\_pacific/south\\_korea.htm](http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/easia_pacific/south_korea.htm) [accessed 12 September 2001]

Such caution also reflects public opinion. As in other literate democracies in an age of mass communication, South Koreans can be roused to temporary euphoria - as with last year's inter-Korean summit - or indignation, as in January 2000 when seven young North Koreans were deported by both Russia and China.<sup>52</sup> A campaign for international recognition of the plight of refugees attracted 11.8 million signatures, over a quarter of the ROK population.<sup>53</sup> In a culture where civic groups abound, NGOs focussing on this issue are growing more active and visible. Yet sentimental concern for suffering fellow-Koreans has its limits. After half a century of division in which living standards in north and south have diverged vastly, the idea of 22 million impoverished northerners swarming south and swamping their hard-won prosperity is a nightmare for most South Koreans. Even the few who are serious about unification tend to endorse the sunshine approach, and so are loath to raise human rights issues.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, the ROK's approach to North Korean refugees may not change much in the next few years.<sup>55</sup> A more conservative government might be less silent on Northern human rights issues, but it will not rock the boat with China or encourage a deluge.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.4. Russia

When North Korean refugees first became a concern in the 1990s, Russia was a prime focus. Unlike the larger numbers entering China after 1995, this mainly involved workers brought to Siberia under contracts going back to the Soviet period, especially as loggers in the Khabarovsk area. Some escaped, and a few attained refugee status and reached Seoul. They told tales of harsh conditions and virtual extra-territoriality, with DPRK agents operating prisons in the camps and repatriating some offenders.<sup>57</sup>

While adverse publicity helped ensure that the forestry treaty was not renewed at state level, in practice local arrangements continued. Now this issue is once again in the spotlight, with reports during Kim Jong-il's visit to Russia this summer that North Korea is repaying its large debts to the ex-USSR by sending labour. This news prompted hostile comment in a Moscow press already critical of the solicitude shown

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<sup>52</sup> See reports and comment in *Korea Now* [Seoul], Vol. 29, No. 2, 29 January 2000, pp. 4, 5, 28-29, 50

<sup>53</sup> Baker, M., N. Korean Refugees Gain a Crusader, but So Far No help", *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 May 2001

<sup>54</sup> See fn 10, and also a very interesting article (no author named), Why Are South Korean Progressives So Indifferent to North Korean Human Rights?, *Keys Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Summer 2001, pp. 20-34

<sup>55</sup> For thoughtful South Korean discussions of different aspects of refugee and defector issues, see Son, Chu Whan, North Korean Refugees: Problems and Policy Considerations, *Korea Focus*, Vol. 7, No. 3, May-Jun 1999; Lee, Sang Man, Resettlement Training for North Korean Refugees, *Korea Focus*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Jan-Feb 2001

<sup>56</sup> Sisci, F., Festering Pyongyang Threatens All of Asia, *Asia Times Online*, 10 March 2001, <http://atimes.com/china/CC10Ad02.html> [accessed 5 September 2001]

<sup>57</sup> See the first-hand account by Lee, Yong-il, The 'Third Area' in Russian Territory, 5 July 2001, on NHKR website, under Witness Accounts, [http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_engl.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_engl.html) [accessed 5 September 2001]. A good overview is Yoon, Yeo-sang, Situation and Protection of North Korean Refugees in Russia, paper presented at the First International Conference on North Korean Human Rights and Refugees, Seoul, 1999 (organized by NKHR). Available at: <http://www.chosunjournal.com/yeosangyoon.html> [accessed 5 September 2001]. See also fn 9 above

to the DPRK leader (all stations where he passed were closed, causing much inconvenience), who to many Russians was an eerie reminder of their own past.<sup>58</sup>

Yet even in the Yeltsin era, a few liberals in Moscow were no match for the economic interests of Khabarovsk and other under-populated regions, to whom DPRK labour is a boon. *A fortiori* the balance of forces will be even less favourable under Putin, who is less liberal generally and seeks to rebuild ties with the DPRK as with other Soviet-era allies. So the likelihood is that labour contracts will increase, with little concern for the rights of DPRK workers. On past form, this will generate escapees who will become refugees. UNHCR should therefore prepare for a higher caseload of DPRK fugitives in Russia in the coming years. As with China protests should of course be registered, with perhaps more hope on two grounds: Russia is partly democratic, and is accused not of direct state oppression itself, but of tolerating it by the DPRK on Russian territory. Even so, the chances of effecting improvements may not be high.

### 3.5. Japan

So far the role of Japan has yet to be considered. Japan has a complex relationship to the DPRK. There are no formal diplomatic ties, but geographical proximity and historical links mean substantial *de facto* contacts. These include migration: in the 1950s and 1960s almost 100,000 Koreans left Japan to settle in North Korea. Tokyo was glad to see them go, and tends to regard the 200,000 or so pro-North Koreans who remain in Japan (a further 500,000 are pro-South) as a fifth column for Pyongyang.<sup>59</sup>

As this suggests, anxiety is a keynote of Japanese attitudes to North Korea. Its main focus is the military threat from missiles, suspected nuclear weapons, and incursions. The latter include alleged abductions of Japanese citizens in the 1970s: an issue that tops Tokyo's agenda in intermittent talks with Pyongyang, which naturally denies all knowledge. There is also some concern for the 6,000 Japanese wives who settled in the DPRK with their Korean husbands, of whom a very few have for the first time in four decades been let out for brief home visits in recent years. In both instances it is its own nationals that concern Japan, not human rights in the abstract. As to refugees, some Japanese profess to fear a potential armada of boat people from North Korea. (There has only ever been one boat, in the 1980s; the family went on to South Korea).

On wider policy towards Pyongyang, Tokyo tends to follow its US and South Korean allies. Thus since 1998 it has gone along with engagement, if reluctantly: it was slow to offer fresh food aid, having had scant thanks for generous gifts in the past. But this is now more complex, given the gulf that has opened between an ROK still committed to sunshine (for now) and a more sceptical US. Moreover, Japan itself has a new leader who is already enmired in controversy, having antagonized both Koreas by

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<sup>58</sup> Dalziel, S., Kim Jong-il's Russian Odyssey, 6 August 2001, *BBC News Online*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid\\_1476000/1476466.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_1476000/1476466.stm) [accessed 12 September 2001]

<sup>59</sup> On Koreans in Japan, see Weiner, M., *The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan, 1910-1923*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989; and for an insider's account, Ryang, S., *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology and Identity*, Boulder CO: Westview, 1997

visiting the Yasukuni shrine - which honours war criminals, among others - and allowing a school history textbook which defends Japan's pre-1945 imperialism.<sup>60</sup>

This reinforces Korean and Chinese suspicions that premier Koizumi, portrayed in the west as a liberal reformer, is a right-wing nationalist. That may be unfair; but if by 2003 both the US and ROK have turned more sceptical on the DPRK, Japan is likely to go along. Japanese public opinion is hostile to North Korea, thanks to its August 1998 rocket launch across Japan and the abduction issue. (When in a bizarre incident in May Kim Jong-il's son and his family were caught trying to enter Japan on false passports - ostensibly to see Disneyland - and promptly deported, critics said they should have been kept as bargaining chips for the release of Japanese abductees.)<sup>61</sup>

In sum, even if underlying Japanese hostility to the DPRK becomes more overt in policy in future, this implies no encouragement of North Korean refugees. Japan is unwelcoming to non-ethnic fugitives in general (as is the ROK), and has a legacy of racism towards Koreans in particular.<sup>62</sup> Insofar as the boat people fantasy lingers - ludicrously: they would head for South Korea - Japan may regard a potential collapse of the DPRK as an even greater threat than the risks posed by North Korea "as is".

### 3.6. The US

Though too geographically remote from Korea to be directly affected by refugees, the United States has been centrally involved ever since it partitioned the peninsula ("temporarily") in 1945.<sup>63</sup> With a continuing security alliance and 37,000 troops in the ROK, the US had no diplomatic contacts with the DPRK until the 1990s, when nuclear concerns led to talks that produced the 1994 Agreed Framework (AF). This in turn ushered in a wider dialogue, including on missiles. That was under Clinton. Since George W. Bush succeeded him and professed initial mistrust, North Korea has eschewed contacts, even though President Bush has now changed his mind. The US continues to provide food aid via WFP, and the Pentagon and the Korean People's Army still cooperate in searching for the remains of US soldiers missing in action from the Korean War.<sup>64</sup>

Bush has also endorsed the AF, criticized by Republicans when in opposition for rewarding North Korea for misbehaviour. But the AF is now approaching a crisis, as new light water reactors (LWRs) cannot be supplied until the DPRK comes back into compliance with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It continues to thwart inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), amid suspicion that plutonium unaccounted for has gone for military use.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For the view from South Korea, see Seoul Stands Firm, *Korea Now* [Seoul], 25 August 2001

<sup>61</sup> Deportation Move Decried, *Japan Times*, 5 May 2001; North Korean Leader's Son Travelled Illegally, but in Style", *Japan Times*, 5 May 2001

<sup>62</sup> United States Committee on Refugees

<sup>63</sup> Cumings, B., *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, New York: W.W.Norton, 1997, pp. 186-7

<sup>64</sup> Associated Press, J. Christensen, Korea War Soldiers Remains Returned, 24 August 2001

<sup>65</sup> IAEA to Adopt Resolution on N.K. Next Month, *Chosun Ilbo*, 31 August 2001; Hart, T., The Impending Agreed Framework Crisis, in G. Jonsson and K. Soffronow (eds.), *Korea: A Stocktaking* Stockholm: Center for Pacific Asia Studies, Stockholm University, 2000

All this is both technical and seemingly remote from refugees. But the nuclear issue almost started a second Korean war in 1994, and retains the capacity to dominate the wider agenda between the DPRK and its various interlocutors. Even if a new nuclear crisis can somehow be avoided, missiles too are high on the US list of concerns; although cynics suggest that Bush is less keen than Clinton to actually resolve this, as North Korea is useful as the potential enemy justifying his missile defence plans. In proposing to resume talks, Bush also annoyed Pyongyang by added conventional force levels as an agendum alongside the familiar pair of nuclear and missile issues.

As this suggests, the US agenda with North Korea is overwhelmingly military, and in particular focussed on weapons of mass destruction. Hence Washington, like other interlocutors, will not needlessly antagonize Pyongyang by raising what it regards as secondary issues, like refugees and human rights in general. In opposition, by contrast, Republicans were happy to denouncet the DPRK as a Stalinist tyranny *par excellence*.<sup>66</sup> Some on the right of the party would still like to do that, and seek to undermine Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy: for instance by inviting the senior northern defector Hwang Jang-yop, whose attacks on Kim Jong-il are ironically now muzzled in Seoul, to speak in Washington.<sup>67</sup> On this view, North Korea should be shunned like Cuba or Iraq: meaning refugees are encouraged, at least in theory. But as this has failed to bring down either regime, pragmatic Republicans see no gain in treating the DPRK the same way; especially against the (current) wishes of their allies in Seoul.<sup>68</sup> Hence Bush's shift from a hawkish to a more moderate stance. Still, if Pyongyang refuses overtures or reverts to provocation, the hawks may gain ground.

The same divide animates Republican views of China, which in turn affects policy on Korea. To the extent that again, after initial hard words, the administration now seeks to improve relations with Beijing, Washington is unlikely to criticize loudly how China treats North Korean refugees: an issue anyway of lower political salience in the US than others with more powerful lobbies, like Tibet. All in all, the US cannot be expected to prioritize refugee issues in its dealings with the DPRK in the years ahead.

This report was written before the recent terrorist attacks on the US, which are bound to cast a long shadow over future American foreign policy in general. Were there any suggestion of DPRK involvement, this would invite military retaliation in some form despite the great risks that would involve. A war scenario could generate refugee flows on a massive scale. Otherwise there are two possibilities. Logically, there should now be less emphasis on North Korea as a prime threat, as has been used hitherto to justify Bush's missile defence plans. Alternatively, Washington may now act more toughly in all directions, including towards Pyongyang.

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<sup>66</sup> United States, Congress, North Korea Advisory Group

<sup>67</sup> The prime mover here is the Defense Forum Foundation, see, <http://defenseforum.org/page9.html> [accessed 5 September 2001]

<sup>68</sup> A key moderate Republican is Donald Gregg, a former US ambassador in Seoul and Asia adviser to George Bush Sr, who is credited with pushing his son to a less hardline stance towards the DPRK. See Reuters, Hepinstall, S. Experts: US Has Rare Opportunity to Engage N. Korea, 28 August 2001



### 3.7. The EU

Finally, mention should be made of the European Union (EU). As noted above, in the past year most EU members and the EU itself have opened formal relations with the DPRK. Moreover, many of these new interlocutors specify human rights as among the issues they plan to raise with Pyongyang.<sup>69</sup> Conversely, human rights concerns are said to be one reason why France so far chooses not to go along with the trend. The EU is also a board member of KEDO (Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization), the consortium set up under the AF to supply LWRs to North Korea.<sup>70</sup>

The decision to recognize the DPRK was partly made in deference to Kim Dae-jung, as its timing - around the third Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Seoul in October 2000 - suggests. Similarly, sending a high-level EU mission to Pyongyang in May was also meant to support the sunshine policy, and to signal to Washington to do likewise. Beyond this, Korea is an opportunity for those who favour a more activist EU foreign policy; and in some ways less difficult than places closer to home, like the Balkans or Middle East. Despite strong economic links with South Korea, Europe cannot really be said to be as closely involved in the region as any of the countries mentioned above. Still, it is commendable that at least somebody at state level is prioritizing human rights with the DPRK. One can only await results, perhaps without undue optimism.<sup>71</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

A short paper can only scratch the surface of complex issues. For a fuller discussion, reference is again made to WRITENET's earlier reports, as well as other works cited. In general, the sunshine or engagement phase of reaching out to North Korea is in difficulties and may be over, with darker clouds ahead. In particular, refugee issues are likely to gain a higher profile, for the reasons given in 2.2 above. However, *raison d'état* means that even if South Korea and Japan follow the US in reverting to a more hostile or sceptical approach to the DPRK, they are unlikely to take the confrontation too far. Since none of North Korea's neighbours wants to risk precipitating a mass exodus of refugees - in itself a defensible view, as this would be profoundly destabilizing in every way: politically, socially, economically, and militarily - the much less defensible corollary is that treatment of existing North Korean refugees will continue to range from unhelpful to brutal so as not to encourage greater numbers.

A final analytical point. Methodologically, as already noted, an exercise like this involves thinking through at least four sets of linkages: between short and long term effects, politics and economics, domestic and external trends, and individual rights and *raison d'état*. Besides that quartet, there is also a more substantive triad. As the

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<sup>69</sup> For an interesting discussion, see Human Rights Without Frontiers, The Controversial Trip of Belgian Parliamentarians to the Country of Kim Il Song, [http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north\\_korea\\_\\_\\_interviews.html](http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north_korea___interviews.html) [accessed 12 September 2001]

<sup>70</sup> See KEDO's official website, <http://www.kedo.org> [accessed 12 September 2001]

<sup>71</sup> The above discussion, and this paper generally, reflect the author's participation over the past year in policy-related seminars in Berlin, Brussels, London, and Paris, which cannot be minuted in more detail.

above discussion has shown, the North Korean refugee issue is closely linked to two other major DPRK concerns: famine, and human rights. All three raise questions about the culpability of Kim Jong-il's regime, and the reaction of the international community. The former is not in doubt, but what is to be done is less clearcut. Those like MSF, who call for all aid to North Korea to stop, risk not only worsening short-run suffering inside the country, but also thereby increasing refugee flows. If the implicit aim is to bring down the regime, that is grossly irresponsible without very careful thought as to the consequences. Evolution is better than revolution. Most analysts, and above all most Koreans, see a soft-landing scenario, if it can be brought off (a big if), as far preferable to German-style collapse with all its risks and costs.

But one can also tread too softly. Though striving to maintain academic detachment in this paper, on a personal note the suffering of North Korean refugees is a source of considerable emotion. It is intolerable that they are treated as pawns in the *Realpolitik* of inter-state relations, even for laudable ends like the sunshine policy. If no government will stand up for these innocents and their rights, then not just NGOs but also international bodies must do so. UNHCR, as is well known, faces many larger refugee crises elsewhere in the world, as well as budgetary constraints; and is itself not immune from pressures to tread delicately on political matters. It must nonetheless be hoped that ways can be found for more robust and effective aid and advocacy for North Korean refugees than hitherto.

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## 6. Appendix: Internet and Other Resources

Since the last WRITENET report on this subject, written a year ago, in September 2000, both the quantity and quality of Internet resources on North Korean refugees and related topics have greatly improved. So as well as the specific references given in footnotes, it may be helpful to list the sites which have been most valuable in writing this report, and thus may be of continuing use to UNHCR in monitoring future developments. Where (as often) a main site is in Korean, the URL given here is to the English-language section. Sites obviously already known to UNHCR, such as the US Committee for Refugees (<http://www.refugees.org>), have been omitted, invaluable though they are. All sites and footnote references were checked during the period 1-12 September 2001.

### A. NGO AND ACADEMIC SOURCES

**Association of North Korean Defectors** (in Korean only)  
<http://www.nkd.or.kr>

**The Chosun Journal**  
<http://www.chosunjournal.com/>

Despite its name, this site does not seem to be related to the *Chosun Ilbo* journal and sites in South Korea. (Chosun is one Korean word for Korea, used by the DPRK and by the last pre-modern dynasty, but not by the ROK which calls itself Hankuk.). Described as an independent site devoted to human rights in North Korea, it is very comprehensive and well-organized, consisting mainly of links to a wide range of news, analysis, NGOs, and testimonies. Though avowedly partisan, it includes a range of perspectives, and a Forum in which Koreans and others argue issues and strategies back and forth. Highly recommended.

**Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights [NKHR]**  
[http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index\\_eng1.html](http://www.nkhumanrights.or.kr/index_eng1.html)

The leading South Korean NGO in this field. Another very useful site, again raising refugee issues within wider human rights concerns. Publishes a weekly email, *Friends Network Newsletter*, and a quarterly journal, *Life and Human Rights in North Korea*.

**Good Friends (Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement)**  
ROK Buddhist organization, very involved with refugees. English website under reconstruction. The old URL (<http://blue.nownuri.net/~kbsm>) currently redirects you to <http://www.jungto.org/gf>, in Korean only. The parent JungTo Society has an English site (<http://www.jungto.org/english/english.html>), but nothing on refugees as such.

**Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)**  
[http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north\\_korea\\_project.html](http://www.hrwf.net/newhrwf/html/north_korea_project.html)  
Partners NKHR overseas. A succinct Belgian site, offering a European perspective

**The Nautilus Institute**  
<http://www.nautilus.org>  
Nautilus is a Berkeley, CA-based NGO specializing in Asian energy, security and environmental issues; and hence with a considerable interest in North Korea, as well as China and elsewhere. Its website is a valuable archive, while its free daily email NAPSNet report and associated special papers are a painless way to keep abreast of the DPRK and other regional issues. The current daily report, with links to a sign-up page and archives, may be viewed at <http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/index.html>

**Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights [NKNET]**  
<http://www.nknet.org/enknet/eindex.htm>  
Covers similar territory to NKHR. Publishes a quarterly journal, *KEYS*. Of interest as a rare instance of South Korean "progressives" - veterans of the struggle against dictatorship, some formerly pro-Pyongyang - breaking ranks with the rest of the ROK left by insisting on raising North Korean human rights issues, including refugees. A new English website is said to be due for launch by the end of September 2001.

### **North Korean Studies**

**<http://north-korea.narod.ru>**

An academic site maintained by Leonid Petrov, a Russian scholar currently at the Australian National University. Extremely useful, especially its section on defectors:

([http://north-korea.narod.ru/defectors\\_new.htm](http://north-korea.narod.ru/defectors_new.htm)), including a link to NKHR (<http://north-korea.narod.ru/alliance.htm>) which may be the most convenient way to read NKHR's own news archive. Also good on DPRK-Russia relations.

### **Rescue the North Korean People! (RENK)**

**<http://www.bekkoame.ne.jp/ro/renk/englishhome.htm>**

An activist group based in Japan. Site is patchy but interesting, including film shot secretly inside North Korea.

## **B. MEDIA SOURCES**

### **Chosun Ilbo**

**<http://nk.chosun.com/english/index.html>**

Seoul's leading conservative daily has several sites that cover the DPRK, mostly critically. The above is a site dedicated to North Korean issues. See also its weekly *North Korea Report* (<http://www.chosun.com/english/special/nkreport1031.html>), which each week covers three or four aspects of the DPRK in telling detail, based presumably on defector and/or intelligence sources. Also the *Chosun*'s associated monthly magazine homepage (<http://monthly.chosun.com>), though mainly in Korean, includes a number of pertinent items in English e.g:

The Tragic Stories of North Korean Refugees

[http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200003/200003020002\\_1.html](http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200003/200003020002_1.html)

The Account of a Korean-Chinese Couple's Recent Visit to North Korea (16 parts)

[http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200003/200003160002\\_1.html](http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200003/200003160002_1.html)

A Letter from North Korea

[http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200007/200007030001\\_1.html](http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200007/200007030001_1.html)

'North Korea's Auschwitz' - the Inside Story on the No. 14 Detention Center (12 parts)

[http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200006/200006130003\\_1.html](http://monthly.chosun.com/html/200006/200006130003_1.html)

### **JoongAng Ilbo**

**<http://english.joins.com>**

South Korea's other leading daily also has good North Korean coverage, if less well laid out than its rival the *Chosun Ilbo*. Sidebars on the left of the homepage offer a three-way choice: news (<http://english.joins.com/NK/index.asp>); analysis (<http://english.joins.com/NK/ana/index.asp>); and op-ed, i.e. opinion pieces (<http://english.joins.com/NK/col/index.asp>). All are valuable.

### **Korea Focus**

**<http://www.kf.or.kr/KoreaFocus>**

A bimonthly digest of policy debate and discussion from the ROK press, compiled by the Korea Foundation in Seoul. Available both as print and online. Excellent source, conveying the full range of South Korean debate. Thoughtful coverage of the DPRK, including refugee and human rights issues. A good search facility.

### **Korea Herald**

**<http://www.koreaherald.co.kr>**

One of Seoul's two English-language dailies

### **Korea Now**

**<http://kn.koreaherald.co.kr/>**

Fortnightly magazine (print and online) produced by the *Korea Herald*. Korea Now has regular North Korea coverage, usually reflecting government views.

### **Korea Times**

**<http://www.koreatimes.co.kr>**

English-language daily, Seoul

### **Yonhap News**

**<http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/services/2000000000.html>**

Oddly, the ROK's quasi-official newsagency, whose English site gives only headlines (not stories) for South Korea, has fuller coverage of the North! Click on left sidebars for weekly news on the DPRK, or for (not very up to date) contents list of the monthly journal *Vantage Point*, itself available only by mail. VP is good, though its tone has changed from hard-line to sunshine since Yonhap took it over from Naewoe Press

## **C. GOVERNMENTAL SOURCES**

### **C1. ROK**

#### **Korea Institute for National Unification [KINU]**

**<http://www.kinu.or.kr/english/index.html>**

The ROK's main official research body on North Korea and unification issues. Its website could be more helpful. KINU includes a Center for North Korean Society and Human Rights, which publishes a very useful annual *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* (seemingly not available online)

#### **Koreascope**

**<http://www.koreascope.org/english>**

Includes a section on North Korea Today, with a sub-section on human rights: <http://www.koreascope.org/english/sub/2/ks2.htm>. It is not clear how recently this has been updated. Also, while there is a list of video materials, most with trenchant titles, the video clips are no longer available (<http://www.koreascope.org/english/sub/vdo/kvc.htm>)

#### **Ministry of Unification**

**<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/index.php>**

#### **National Intelligence Service**

**<http://www.nis.go.kr/english>**

The NIS has several substantial sections on North Korea, including testimonies by defectors ([http://www.nis.go.kr/english/democratic/defector\\_index.html](http://www.nis.go.kr/english/democratic/defector_index.html)); but none seemingly more recent than May 2000.

### **C2. DPRK**

Although no websites yet exist with the DPRK's allocated suffix (.kp) actually inside North Korea, the following have quasi-official status in varying degrees:

#### **DPRK Infobank**

**<http://www.english.dprkorea.com>**

This site, produced by the Pan-Pacific Economic Development Association of Korean Nationals, is newer and far more professional than the others listed here, if no more informative on refugees. However, to get very far entails paying a US\$300 membership fee.

#### **Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)**

**<http://www.kcna.co.jp>**

#### **The People's Korea**

**<http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk>**

This site is maintained by pro-North Koreans in Japan