



NORTH KOREA: THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND MONITORING HUMAN RIGHTS

RIGHT TO FOOD

Nearly a million people have died because of acute food shortages since the mid-1990s, and millions more, especially children and the elderly, suffer from chronic malnutrition. The North Korean government is exacerbating people's suffering by impeding UN and humanitarian organizations' relief efforts.

Heavy rains and subsequent flooding in July 2006 and again in August and September 2007 contributed to a sharp decline in food production. In March 2009, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that only two million out of 6.2 million people targeted by its emergency operation in 2008 were able to receive limited food assistance.

The government reportedly prioritizes high-ranking military and government officials when distributing available food rations. Most of the population receive only a few days' worth of grain per month on major holidays such as Kim Il-sung's birthday. One enlisted soldier who escaped to South Korea testified that he was forced to supplement his intake with wild "foods" such as grass.

Except in the capital city of Pyongyang, people suffer more in urban areas than those living in rural areas where they may have access to farms and fields. Poor domestic food production, near collapse of the government-run food distribution system and food aid not reaching those most in need have forced people in urban areas to

scavenge for food. Northern provinces such as North and South Hamgyeong and Ryanggang have been particularly affected.

Despite food shortages reaching critical levels, the government has failed to seek any international co-operation and assistance. In March 2009, the government refused to accept further food aid from the USA citing strained relations. The government also told five US humanitarian aid organizations to leave North Korea by the end of March 2009. Similarly in 2008, North Korea did not request assistance from South Korea, the biggest donor of rice and fertilizer in previous years.

The government continues to deny WFP sufficient access to ensure that food is distributed to those most in need. Access to some areas can only be carried out with advance notice and monitors are carefully guided on their inspections.

By failing to provide minimum essential levels of food, impeding access to humanitarian food aid and refusing to accept international co-operation and assistance, the North Korean government is violating the right to adequate food under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which North Korea is a state party. The government is also failing in its obligations to respect and protect the right to life under Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS DENIED ACCESS

The North Korean government refuses to recognize, or grant access to, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea despite international concerns and repeated UN resolutions condemning "systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights". The government has also denied access to UN Special Rapporteurs on the right to freedom of opinion and expression (2002), the right to freedom of religion and belief (1999) and the right to food (2003).

Amnesty International and other independent human rights organizations have also been refused access.

Ongoing restrictions on access for independent monitors, inter-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations impede efforts to assess human rights, in particular with regard to access to food, medical care and other basic necessities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTH KOREA TO:

RIGHT TO FOOD

- Grant immediate and unfettered access to the World Food Programme and humanitarian organizations to ensure that food reaches all those who are in need.
- Ensure that there is no discrimination in the distribution of food aid and that it is delivered on the basis of need.
- Give priority to ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups have access to adequate food.

ACCESS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS

- Invite independent monitors such as UN Special Rapporteurs on the right to food, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion and belief, and in particular, the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the country.
- Invite independent human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, to investigate and monitor human rights.

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Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

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