



# The Hidden GULAG

## Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps

*Prisoners' Testimonies  
and Satellite Photographs*

David Hawk  
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In August 1995, Hawk traveled to Rwanda to investigate that nation's massacres for the U.S. Committee for Refugees, and in 1995, he returned to Kigali on a mission for Amnesty International. More recently, Hawk has consulted for the Landmine Survivors Network on U.S. landmine policy and humanitarian assistance projects in Cambodia and Vietnam. From 2001 to 2003, Hawk was a Brandeis University Fellow in Human Rights, Intervention, and International Law. A former executive director of Amnesty International/USA, he has served on the board of directors of that organization and on the advisory board of Human Rights Watch/Asia.

Hawk traveled to Seoul three times between August 2002 and February 2003 to interview former North Korean prisoners now in exile in South Korea for this report.

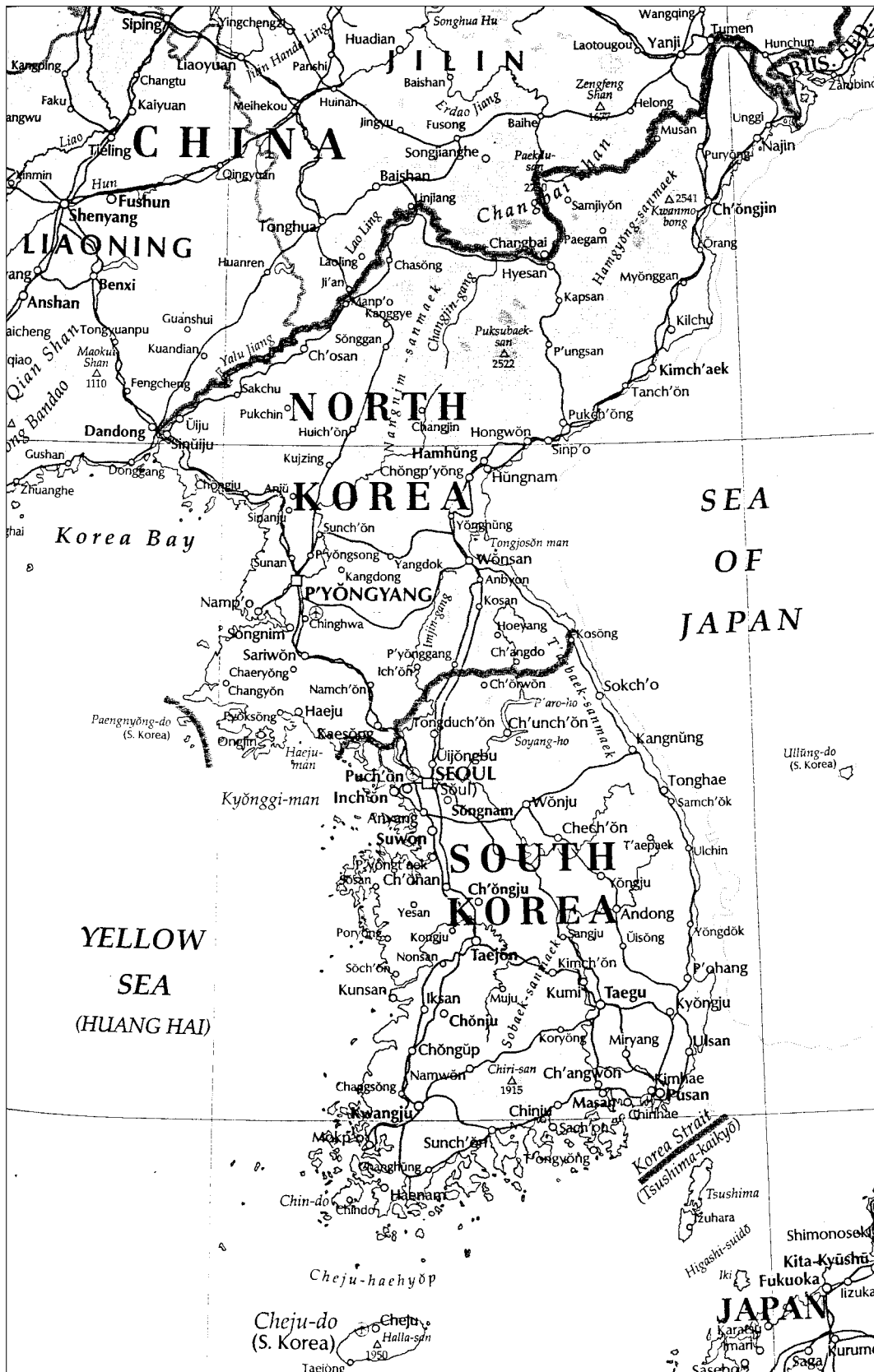
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea expresses its deep appreciation to the Seoul-based Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (Citizens' Alliance) and the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights (NKnet) for arranging interviews in South Korea. An additional interview was arranged by Pnan, a refugee assistance group. The Committee also owes a debt of gratitude to the many North Korean former prisoners for their patience during the painstaking process of collecting information for this report, and for their courage for speaking out.

Obtaining the satellite images for this report would not have been possible without the support of DigitalGlobe, a spatial imaging and information company based in the United States. The Committee expresses its deep appreciation for DigitalGlobe's support, and for its important contributions in the field of satellite imaging.

This project has been made possible by the combined efforts of many talented and committed people. Highest appreciation goes to Matthew McKinzie, Sujin Hwang, Jason Slemmons, and Tom Cochran of the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy organization, for their technical expertise related to the satellite photographic images. The Committee is indebted to Benjamin Yoon and Young Ja Kim of the Citizens' Alliance, and Howard Young of NKnet for their help, particularly in connection with the Glossary of Repression. Special thanks go to Hae Young Lee of the Citizens' Alliance for her invaluable assistance in reviewing the plethora of maps and satellite photographs with former North Korean prisoners, and for serving as skilled intermediary, translator, and fact-checker. Louisa Coan Greve's thoughtful review of the preliminary drafts of the report has greatly enhanced the finished product. Appreciation goes to the anonymous reviewers, and to Erin Sawaya for a range of assistance.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Preface: Anne Applebaum, author of <i>Gulag: A History</i>	8
Executive Summary	10
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	14
Note on Sources	15
Not in a Vacuum	17
Note on Translations	18
Information Base	19
Glossary of North Korean Repression	22
<b>PART ONE</b>	
<b>THE NORTH KOREAN GULAG I:     KWAN-LI-SO POLITICAL PENAL-LABOR COLONIES</b>	
Introduction: Generations Imprisoned without Trial	24
Who Are the Political Prisoners?	26
How Do We Know?	28
<b>Witnesses and Testimony</b>	
Witness: Ali Lamada, Sariwon	29
Witness: KANG Chol Hwan	30
Witness: AN Hyuk	31
Witness: KIM Tae Jin	32
Witness: LEE Young Kuk	33
Testimony: <i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 15	34
Witness: KIM Yong	36
Testimony: <i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 14	37
Testimony: <i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 18	38
Witness: AHN Myong Chol	38
Testimony: <i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 22	39
<b>Closed <i>Kwan-li-so</i></b>	
Witness: CHOI Dong Chul	40
Nos. 11, 13, 26, 12, 27	40
<b>Other <i>Kwan-li-so</i></b>	
Nos. 16, 25, Suseong, 105	41
<b>THE NORTH KOREAN GULAG II:     KYO-HWA-SO PRISON-LABOR FACILITIES</b>	
Introduction: Deaths in Detention	41
<b>Witnesses and Testimony</b>	
Witness: LEE Soon Ok	43
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 1, Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province	44
Witness: JI Hae Nam	46
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 1, Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province	47
Witness: Former Prisoner #6	48
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 77, Danchun, North Hamgyong Province	48

Witness: YOU Chun Sik	49
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 22, Oro-kun, South Hamgyong Province	51
Witness: Former Prisoner #3	51
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 3, Sinuiju, North Pyong-an Province	52
Witness: Former Prisoner #12	52
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province	52
Witness: Former Prisoner #19	53
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 4, Kangdong-kun, South Pyong-an Province	53
Witness: Former Prisoner #28	54
Testimony: <i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 12, Jeonger-ri, North Pyong-an Province	55

## PART TWO

### DETENTION FACILITIES AND PUNISHMENTS FOR NORTH KOREANS FORCIBLY REPATRIATED FROM CHINA

Introduction: <i>kam-ok, ku-ryu-jang, jip-kyul-so, ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae</i>	56
<b>Witnesses and Testimony</b>	
Witness: CHOI Yong Hwa	60
Testimony: Provincial Detention Center, South Sinuiju	60
Witness and Testimony: Former Detainee #24 Provincial Detention Center, South Sinuiju	61
Witness: Former Detainee #1, Nongpo Provincial Detention Center, Chongjin	63
Testimony: Nongpo Provincial Detention Center, Chongjin	63
Witness and Testimony: Former Detainee #8, Chongjin Detention Center	64
Witness and Testimony: Former Detainee #9, Onsong Labor- Training Camp and Chongjin Provincial Detention Center	65
Witness and Testimony: Former Detainee #21, Onsong Police Jail	66
Witness and Testimony: Former Detainee #25, Onsong Detention Center and Nongpo Detention Center	67
Witness: Former Detainee #26, Nongpo Detention Center	68
Testimony: Nongpo Detention Center	69

## PART THREE

Summary of Torture Testimony	70
Summary of Infanticide Testimony	72

## PART FOUR

Recommendations	73
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## APPENDICES

A. U.N. Commission on Human Rights, Resolution on North Korea, 15 April 2003, E/CN.4/2003/L.31/Rev.1	76
B. Concluding Observations of the U.N. Human Rights Committee: Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 27 July 2001 CCPR/CO/72/PRK	79
C. International Labor Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work	86

## SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Satellite Imagery of the North Korean Gulag <i>Matthew McKinzie, Natural Resources Defense Council</i>	88
Map of Selected North Korean Prison Camp Locations	89
<i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 15, Yodok, South Hamgyong Province <i>Annotations: KANG Chol Hwan</i>	
Partial Overview	90
Detail of Knup-ri District	91
Detail of Knup-ri District	92
Detail of Knup-ri District	93
Detail of Yongpyong-ri District	94
Detail of Yongpyong-ri District	95
Detail of Pyongchang-ri District	96
Detail of Limsan Valley	97
Detail of Prison Workers' Unit 4 Village	98
Detail of Ipsok-ri District	99
Detail of Gold Mine Village	100
<i>Kwan-li-so</i> Nos. 14 and 18, Kaechon and Bukchang, South Hamgyong Province <i>Annotations: KIM Yong</i>	
Partial Overview	101
Detail of No. 18, 6th Division	102
Detail of No. 18, 6th Division	103
Detail of No. 18, 6th Division	104
Detail of No. 18, 4th and 5th Divisions	105
Detail of No. 18, 4th and 5th Divisions	106
Detail of No. 18 Periphery	107
Detail of No. 18 Periphery	108
Detail of No. 14 and No. 18	109
Detail of No. 14, Headquarters	110
Detail of No. 14, Prisoner Housing	111
Detail of No. 14, Prisoner Housing	112
<i>Kwan-li-so</i> No. 22, Haengyong, North Hamgyong Province <i>Annotations: AHN Myong Chol (taken from the Far Eastern Economic Review)</i>	
Overview	113
Detail of Northern Haengyong	114
Detail of Southern Haengyong	115
Detail of Haengyong Headquarters	116
Detail of Chungbong Mine	117
<i>Kyo-hwa-so</i> No. 1, Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province <i>Annotations: JI Hae Nam, LEE Soon Ok</i>	118
Sinuiju Detention Center, North Pyong-an Province <i>Annotations: Former Prisoner</i>	119
Nongpo Detention Center, Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province <i>Annotations: Former Prisoner</i>	120



# PREFACE

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**Anne Applebaum**

*In 1929, when Stalin's Politburo first began* to discuss the expansion of the concentration camp system that eventually became known as the gulag, there were almost no objections. According to the protocols of the commission set up to examine the matter, a few of the Soviet Union's leaders did worry that it would be difficult to set up prison camps in the far northern region of the country. A few also wondered whether it would be possible to build roads and railroads to those distant places. No one, then or later, worried that conditions would be too harsh or that too many people would die. In the end, only one possible problem was taken seriously: that the system might look bad abroad. "The bourgeois foreign press," one commissar complained, might claim that "instead of building a penitentiary system intended to reform prisoners through corrective labor, we've put up [secret police] fortresses."

In other words, the Politburo never worried that the camps *were* bad, but some did fear that they might *look* bad. That fear continued to nag at Stalin's henchmen, as well as their successors. In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union went to great lengths to disguise the number of prisoners working in its logging camps, in order to discourage foreign boycotts of Soviet timber. In 1931, the writer Maxim Gorky was commissioned to write a book — *The Canal Named for Stalin* — that described, in glowing terms, the White Sea Canal. The canal had been constructed by some 100,000 prisoners working in the most primitive conditions imaginable. The book was intended to convince foreigners that Soviet prisoners had been enlightened by the experience. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s — and indeed throughout the 1970s and 1980s — the Stalinist regime laid on elaborate propaganda tours for foreign delegations, inviting them to see how well prisoners lived. Model prisons were constructed especially for such visitors.

At the same time, the regime did its best to hide the real truth about the camps, concealing both the vast geographic extent of the slave-labor system, as well as the enormous numbers of prisoners involved. From 1918, right up until the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Soviet leaders did everything possible to hide their prisons and labor camps from the outside world. They feared both that the Soviet Union's international reputation would be damaged if the truth were known, and, more importantly, that the revelation about life in the camps would undermine the regime's legitimacy at home. If the "bourgeois foreign press" got hold of the evidence, after all, then it would be far harder for the Soviet Union to portray itself as progressive, as enlightened, and as the font of international revolution.

In the fullest possible sense, the contemporary leaders of North Korea are the intellectual and moral descendants of these Stalinists. From the testimony presented so vividly in this volume, it is clear, first of all, that the North Korean camps were built according to a Stalinist model, and that they continue to be run that way. Documents have already come to light proving that the Soviet Union sent advisers to China in the 1950s to help the Chinese organize labor camps. This volume provides strong evidence that something similar happened in North Korea. As in Stalin's time, North Koreans are arrested for trumped-up political "crimes," such as reading a foreign newspaper, singing a South Korean pop song, or "insulting the authority" of the North Korean leadership. As in Stalin's time, North Korean prisoners — even children — are given ludicrous and impossible work "quotas" to fulfill and are subjected to brutal, irrational punishments. And, as in Stalin's time, North Korea's leadership doesn't want anyone to know any of these details, since such revelations not only will damage their foreign reputation but also put their own regime at risk.

This, of course, is precisely why the full documentation of the North Korean camps is so important and why this report, compiled with such care and precision, is so significant. Painstakingly, David Hawk and the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea have compiled an enormous amount of information, including not just the numbers of prisoners and the locations of camps but also the details of camp life — the winter cold, the numb fingers, the workplace accidents — that make the stories more vivid. Those details are also what make this report so powerful.

Some, of course, will avoid reading it, fully knowing that if they do read it, they will have to change their tactics, or at least think differently about the political problems posed by North Korea. Certainly after absorbing such details, it will be more difficult for Americans or Europeans to sit down and negotiate, coldly, with their Korean counterparts and not mention human rights violations. South Koreans, when they know the details of life in the North, will also find it more difficult to argue in favor of appeasing the Northern regime. If these stories filter back to the North Korean police and administrators, those officials too will find it more difficult to justify their own behavior, or to claim that they don't know what is really happening in the country's concentration camps. And if the full truth about the camps becomes known to the wider population, then whatever support remains for the state constructed by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il will begin, even more decisively, to ebb away.

This is not to say that words can make a dictatorship collapse overnight. But words certainly can make a dictatorship collapse over time, as experience during the last two decades has shown. Totalitarian regimes are built on lies and can be damaged, even destroyed, when those lies are exposed. The greater and more detailed evidence that can be provided, the more damage the truth can do.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report describes a number of penal institutions in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) administered by two different North Korean police agencies: the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency)<sup>1</sup> and the more political *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency). The report outlines two distinct systems of repression: first, a North Korean gulag<sup>2</sup> of forced-labor colonies, camps, and prisons where scores of thousands of prisoners — some political, some convicted felons — are worked, many to their deaths, in mining, logging, farming, and industrial enterprises, often in remote valleys located in the mountainous areas of North Korea; and second, a system of smaller, shorter-term detention facilities along the North Korea–China border used to brutally punish North Koreans who flee to China — usually in search of food during the North Korean famine crisis of the middle to late 1990s — but are arrested by Chinese police and forcibly repatriated to the DPRK.

Both police agencies above are involved with both repressive systems detailed and categorized in the following pages. And both systems involve extreme phenomena of repression that, to the researcher’s knowledge, are unique to North Korea: guilt-by-association, lifetime sentences of hard labor for three generations of individuals related to the purged political prisoners who are sent to the gulag with no judicial process whatsoever; and forced abortions for detained North Korean pregnant women forcibly repatriated from China or the murder of their newborn infants.

**Introduction.** The introduction of this report outlines the methodology, sources, and information-base used in creating the report and contains a glossary of terms relating to North Korean repression.

**Part One.** Part One of this report begins by describing the phenomena of repression associated with the North Korean *kwan-li-so*, most descriptively translated as “political penal-labor colonies.” In the *kwan-li-so*, tens of thousands of political prisoners — along with up to three generations of their families — are banished and imprisoned without any judicial process for usually lifetime sentences. Their sentences entail slave labor in mining, logging, and farming enterprises in the valleys of mountainous areas in north and north-central North Korea. The *kwan-li-so* are described as colonies because they are sprawling encampments, twenty or more miles long and ten to twenty miles wide, containing multiple, enclosed, self-contained sections, or “villages,” for different categories of prisoners. Some of the sections are for the political prisoners; others are for the families of the presumed political offenders, so that purged political prisoners have no contact with their imprisoned parents, grandparents, or children.

The existence of the political forced-labor camps is denied by the DPRK. Part One of this report also describes how the outside world has come to know about these political penal-labor colonies, and what is known about who the prisoners are.

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<sup>1</sup> Before 1998, called the *Sa-hoe-an-jeon-bu* (Social Safety Agency).

<sup>2</sup> A Russian-language acronym for *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, the “general administration of [slave labor] camps.”

One of the *kwan-li-so*, No. 15, at Yodok in South Hamgyong Province, is unique in that it has a re-education section, from which small numbers of prisoners can be released. At least four such prisoners have been released from Yodok, fled North Korea, and were interviewed for this report. They are profiled, along with a description of *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 drawn from their accounts. Only one former prisoner is known to have escaped from the *kwan-li-so*. He is profiled along with his account of No. 14 and No. 18, where he was imprisoned. A former guard at several *kwan-li-so* defected to South Korea. His story is told along with his description of *Kwan-li-so* No. 22. With the exception of *Kwan-li-so* No. 18, the political penal-labor colonies are administered by the *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency).

Formerly there had been a dozen *kwan-li-so*, but these have been consolidated into six or seven colonies. This consolidation and what is known about the closed camps is briefly described. Within the last several months, commercial satellite photographs of several *kwan-li-so* have become available. Several such photographs are contained in this report, with specific buildings identified by the former prisoners.

Part One of this report goes on to describe the second component of the North Korean gulag: a series of smaller penal-labor camps and penitentiary-like institutions called *kyo-hwa-so*. In the *kyo-hwa-so*, as in the *kwan-li-so*, prisoners are compelled to perform hard labor — virtually slave labor — under dreadfully harsh conditions, in mining, logging, textile manufacturing, or other industrial projects, such as brick- or cement-making. However, these prisoners are subjected to a judicial process and given fixed-term sentences according to the DPRK criminal code, after which they can be released. The *kyo-hwa-so* are administered by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency).

The majority of *kyo-hwa-so* prisoners are imprisoned because they have been convicted of what would be in any society felony crimes. But some prisoners are “political” in that they are convicted for actions that would not be normally criminalized: one woman interviewed for this report, for example, described being convicted of disturbing the “socialist order” for singing, in a private home, a South Korean pop song.

A major phenomenon of repression associated with the *kyo-hwa-so* is the shockingly large number of deaths in detention from slave labor under dangerous circumstances and from starvation-level food rations. Former prisoners interviewed for this report explain that many of their fellow captives did not expect to survive long enough to complete their sentences — and that thousands of them did not survive. States, of course, have the right to deprive duly convicted criminals of liberty and remove them from society. States do not have the right to deprive prisoners of their right to food, or to work them, literally, to death. Eight former *kyo-hwa-so* prisoners were interviewed for this report. Their stories, and their accounts of seven different prison-labor camps, are described in Part One.

**Part Two.** Part Two of this report describes a series of detention facilities, administered by North Korean police forces, that are located in areas along the North Korea–China border and used to interrogate and punish North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China. These facilities are called *ka-mok* (police-station jails) or *ku-ryu-jang* (detention-interrogation facilities, typically inside a police station). The two types of penal-labor facilities in this system are called *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training camps) and *jip-kyul-so* (detention/forced-labor centers). Provincial *jip-kyul-so* are referred to as *do-jip-kyul-so*.

The *jip-kyul-so* detention centers are facilities where both repatriated North Koreans and low- or misdemeanor-level criminals are held for up to six months of hard labor, for example brick-making or local construction projects. It should be noted that many technically illegal misdemeanor offenses are famine-motivated, for example taking food from state storehouses or state farm fields; not showing up at one’s assigned workplace (when the North Korean production-distribution system broke down and enterprises were no longer in production or paying wages, many workers stopped going to their assigned jobs); unauthorized private enterprise; unauthorized trading or economic activity; leaving one’s assigned village without authorization; or leaving the country without authorization.

The *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* labor-training camps are even shorter-term, more localized detention/forced-labor facilities. One former detainee stated that, unlike the *jip-kyul-so* detention centers and the *kyo-hwa-so* prison-labor facilities, the *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* do not appear in the North Korean statute books. Rather, they are ad hoc measures initiated by local authorities to cope with the overflow of famine-related misdemeanor arrestees. Another former detainee mentioned that all inmates in one labor-training camp were former repatriates who were being isolated from the common-crime detainees in the provincial detention center, so that the repatriated detainees could not tell the common-crime detainees about the prosperity and personal freedoms available in China.

When first repatriated from China, North Koreans are questioned in the police jails and detention facilities about why they went to China, what they did there, and when. More ominous questions follow, revolving around whether the individual being questioned had any contact with South Koreans while in China, which is deemed a political offense. (Many North Koreans do have contact with South Koreans there, as this part of northeast China, formerly known as Manchuria, is frequented by South Korean businessmen, students, tourists, missionaries, and refugee and humanitarian aid workers.) Fearing transfer to a *kwan-li-so* or *kyo-hwa-so*,<sup>3</sup> or even execution, repatriated North Koreans typically deny having had any contact with South Koreans or exposure to South Korean radio stations, television programs, movies, or music while in China. But such denials often are not deemed credible by the North Korean police, who literally attempt to beat the truth out of the repatriated detainees. When the police are satisfied, the repatriates are transferred to the *jip-kyul-so* police detention centers or *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* labor-training camps. This report tells the stories of nine North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China, and the police interrogations, detentions, and mistreatments these Koreans were subjected to upon repatriation.

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<sup>3</sup> Three former repatriated persons interviewed for this report were so transferred.

Two phenomena of extreme repression are associated with the treatments meted out to repatriated Koreans. First, the *jip-kyul-so*, despite the shortness of sentences served there, are characterized by very high levels of deaths in detention from inadequate food combined with excessively hard labor — most seriously affecting those detainees lacking nearby relatives to bring them extra food. (Many detainees, when they become too emaciated or sick to perform hard labor, are given sick-leave or release so that they can recover or die at home, reducing the number of deaths in detention.) Second, in at least three places of detention along the North Korea–China border cited by persons interviewed for this report, North Korean women who were pregnant when repatriated were subsequently subjected to forced abortions, or if the pregnancy was too advanced, were allowed to deliver their babies only to have them killed immediately after birth (based on the possibility that the Korean women had been impregnated by Han Chinese men).

**Part Three.** Most of the prisoners and detainees interviewed for this report were tortured, many horribly and repeatedly. Part Three of this report summarizes the methods of torture endured or witnessed by the former prisoners and detainees interviewed. It also summarizes the testimony of eight former detainees who themselves witnessed or have firsthand knowledge of forced abortions and ethnic infanticide.

**Part Four.** The concluding section of this report, Part Four, makes various recommendations to the DRPK, to China and South Korea, as North Korea’s closest neighbors, and to other U.N. Member States in the international community. In regards to the last, this report includes recommendations that all intergovernmental contact with North Korea should include discussion of improvements of human rights conditions. Further, it makes the case for incorporating human rights conditions in any comprehensive approach to the multiple crises that North Korea faces with nearby and other states — security-related, political-diplomatic, and humanitarian.

Specifically, any security and cooperation agreement for the Korean peninsula should require that all parties, including North Korea, demonstrate respect for human rights, including the rights of refugees who have fled North Korea, encourage human contact, promote the reunification of families, and provide for the free flow of information. Additionally, verified improvements in North Korea’s human rights situation should be included in any comprehensive approach to the Korean crises involving foreign aid to or investment in North Korea. Any multilateral or bilateral arrangements involving foreign investment in extraction or production enterprises in North Korea for export to world markets should preclude the utilization of forced, slave, or prison labor, or the evolution of a situation where privileged workers in exclusive export zones produce for world markets, while production for domestic consumption is based on prison, forced, and slave labor.

# INTRODUCTION

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In his 1997 history *Korea's Place in the Sun*, Bruce Cumings predicted, "... if and when the [North Korean] regime falls, we will probably learn of larger numbers [of people held in prisons and reform-through-labor camps] and various unimaginable atrocities..."<sup>4</sup>

Korea specialists Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig have noted that increasing diplomatic ties "are not accompanied by people-to-people relations as North Korea's borders remain closed. In North Korea it is an article of faith to keep outsiders guessing about what is happening in the country.... This lack of transparency forces outsiders to draw conclusions based on fragmentary evidence."<sup>5</sup>

Since the turn of the millennium, a growing number of North Korean defectors and escapees have obtained asylum in South Korea. A small number of these desperate, famine-fleeing North Koreans received media and diplomatic attention in 2001 and 2002, when they broke through gates or climbed the fences of various embassies, consulates, and missions in Beijing. Much larger numbers of North Koreans have fled to China across the Yalu or Tumen rivers into the area of northeast China formerly known as Manchuria and reached South Korea via an extraordinary 4,000- to 5,000-mile trek involving some combination of bus, train, car, motorbike taxis, and walking. They travel south to Beijing, Shanghai, or Kunming, and then down through Burma, Laos, or Vietnam into Cambodia before reaching Thailand, and then flying to Seoul. Other escapees reach Seoul by traveling to Mongolia or Hong Kong.

A number of these North Korean escapees and defectors<sup>6</sup> were either prisoners or guards in a variety of prison camps and detention/punishment facilities in North Korea. Their fragments of information are accumulating and now afford a closer look at the North Korean system of forced-labor camps and the unimaginable atrocities taking place under the rule of Kim Jong Il. This report is based on a review of materials written in English and on thirty in-depth interviews with former North Koreans who found asylum in South Korea. These interviews were conducted largely in Seoul in August 2002, November–December 2002, and February 2003.

Most of the information in this report comes from former prisoners, who during their interviews described in detail the situations of their imprisonment, their living and work units, and their treatment and observations while imprisoned or detained. These prisoners' accounts are corroborated and amplified by accounts from former prison guards, who saw larger areas of the prison camps, as the prisoners were usually confined to cells and worksites. The perspectives of the prison guards are further amplified by a former prison-system official "defector," whose account provides additional information on the workings of the prison-camp system. (See the Information Base for an overview of the

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Cumings. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 398. Bracketed explanations provided by David Hawk.

<sup>5</sup> Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, eds., "The New North Korea," *Korea Briefing 2000–2001*. (Armonk: N.Y.: East Gate Books, M.E. Sharpe), 78–9.

<sup>6</sup> South Koreans commonly refer to all North Koreans now resident in the Republic of Korea as "defectors," using the name applied to high-level communist Korean Workers' Party officials who "defected" to Seoul in the 1990s. Most of the new North Korean arrivals in South Korea are more accurately termed "escapees," having fled North Korea to escape starvation and/or extreme brutality.

prison camps and detention facilities where individuals interviewed for this report were incarcerated or employed.)

From the accumulated information, it is possible to outline two distinct systems of incarceration in North Korea. Both of these exhibit exceptional violations of internationally recognized human rights: an extremely brutal gulag of sprawling political penal-labor colonies, called *kwan-li-so* in Korean, and prison-labor facilities, called *kyo-hwa-so*; and a separate but also extremely brutal system of imprisonment, interrogation, torture, and forced labor for North Koreans who are forcibly repatriated from China. This latter incarceration system includes police jails, called *ka-mok*, and police detention facilities, called *ku-ryu-jang*, along the North Korea–China border, and short-term detention/forced-labor centers, called *jip-kyul-so*, and even shorter-term, more localized detention/forced-labor training camps, called *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae*.

The *kwan-li-so* include the repressive phenomenon of lifetime sentences for perceived political wrongdoers paired with guilt-by-association imprisonment for up to three generations of the supposed wrongdoers' families. Whatever the category, all the prison facilities are characterized by very large numbers of deaths in detention from forced, hard labor accompanied by deliberate starvation-level food rations. Incarceration of Koreans repatriated from China includes routine torture during interrogation and the practice of forced abortion or infanticide inflicted upon babies borne by pregnant repatriates.

## Note on Sources

Many of the former prisoners interviewed for this report, believing their relatives to be dead or now living in South Korea, agreed to have their names and, in some cases, their photographs published. Many others, however, knowing that the North Korean government practices collective punishment, would agree to be interviewed and provide testimony only under condition of anonymity, lest relatives remaining in North Korea be punished for the interviewees' crime of escaping to the Republic of Korea. Such individuals are identified in this report with a number rather than a pseudonym (such as "Former Detainee #6," for example, or "Former Prisoner #13").

For some prison camps and detention facilities described in this report, more than one source of information was available. In such cases, one person's account could be checked against another's. In other cases, the description of a particular camp or facility rested on the testimony of one former prisoner. In those cases, I had to rely on the coherence and internal consistency of the testimony, and my professional experience.<sup>7</sup> In more than thirty interviews in and around Seoul, only one struck me as sufficiently garbled and inconsistent as to be unreliable and unusable — from a very recent arrival who wanted to make declarations against North Korea but whose story and factual assertions dissolved under close questioning.

The phenomena of repression, in this case terrible human rights violations, happen to individual human beings. Their personal stories are at least as important as the information

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<sup>7</sup> In the course of several decades of human rights work, I have interviewed large numbers of victims of repression from a variety of political systems and country situations: perhaps, most notably, hundreds of survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 and dozens of survivors of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.



their stories provide about the prison-labor camps. Many former North Korean prisoners have, like the Cambodian and Rwandan survivors I interviewed in the 1980s and 1990s, extraordinary stories. Thus, brief sketches of their personal histories are provided along with their descriptions of the prison camps they survived. To a large extent, this report uses the format of briefly profiling a witness (under the heading “Witness”) before providing his or her testimony about the particular camp or facility in which he or she was incarcerated and the phenomena of repression endured and observed there (under the heading “Testimony”). In cases where more than one witness account of a given camp or facility was available, each witness is profiled separately before their combined testimony appears.

This is not to say that the interviewees’ memories are always entirely accurate or that some details have not been lost in translation. There may be minor errors in the accounts that follow. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the overwhelming bulk of testimony is reliable. And the stories in this report create a fuller picture of the phenomena of repression in North Korea than has previously existed in English-language sources.

This report does not claim, however, to be comprehensive, as the presently available database is not sufficient for such purposes. For example, evidence has emerged from various sources about the “9/27” camps for *kotjebi*, the young street children orphaned by the breakdown of families caused by extreme famine. But as the interviewees for this report, most of whom were middle-aged or young adults, provided no information on “9/27” camps, information about such facilities is not included.

Another example of missing information: Anne Applebaum notes in her book *Gulag: A History*, that the Soviet prison-labor camp system “produced a third of the Soviet Union’s gold, much of its coal and timber, and a great deal of everything else.”<sup>8</sup> Given the breakdown of North Korea’s production system, one wonders about the economic role and significance of the prison-labor camps in North Korea. Former North Korean prison camp guard AHN Myong Chol states that *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 supplies some forty percent of the corn consumed in North and South Hamgyong provinces. Women at the Kaechon prison-labor camp, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1, produce — under abominable conditions — textile goods for export to the U.S.S.R., Japan, and France. Other prisoners interviewed for this report mined gold, coal, iron, and magnesite in slave-labor prison camps, exactly the extractive industries cited by Selig Harrison for North Korea’s export potential.<sup>9</sup> But, on the whole, to my knowledge, production data from the camps is not available; and the economic role of the camps is not discussed in this report.

Nor is there enough data to project trends over time or to extrapolate beyond the places specifically identified. While I consulted several Korea experts in South Korea and the United States, primarily to fill in some gaps in my own understanding of the North Korean system, the accounts that follow adhere very closely to the information provided by the former prisoners and guards personally interviewed for this report. That information is sufficient to pinpoint the terrible phenomena of repression that victimizes tens or hundreds of thousands of North Koreans.

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Applebaum. *Gulag: A History*. (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2003), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Selig S. Harrison. *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, Century Foundation Book, 2002), Chapter Five.

North Korean authorities deny that the kinds of prison camps described herein exist and that human rights violations occur in North Korea. Such governmental denials cannot be taken at face value. The only real way for North Korea to contradict or invalidate the claims and stories in the refugee accounts is by inviting United Nations officials, U.N. Human Rights Commission representatives, or reputable NGOs such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch to verify or invalidate on-site the allegations of former prisoners. Otherwise the refugees' testimonies stand.

In the event that North Korean authorities decline to engage in the constructive and substantive dialogue with U.N. human rights officials requested in a recent resolution by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights,<sup>10</sup> it can only be hoped that sufficient resources will be found to enable South Korean NGOs or independent human rights bodies to more thoroughly and systematically document the violations outlined in this report.

## Not in a Vacuum

In 1988, the North Korean Ambassador to the United Nations wrote to the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee that violations of human rights do not take place and are “unthinkable” in North Korea.<sup>11</sup> In 1994, an official publication, *The People's Korea* proclaimed, “...there is no ‘human rights problem’ in our Republic either from the institutional or from the legal point of view.”<sup>12</sup> North Korean diplomats at the United Nations in Geneva continue to deny that there are any — *any* — violations of human rights in Korea.<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, the extreme human rights violations documented in this report occur in an environment of the wholesale denial of fundamental rights and freedoms. For descriptions of the North Korean human rights situation generally, readers are referred to the 1988 Minnesota Lawyers/Human Rights Watch Report referenced above, the annual human rights reports by the U.S. Department of State, various reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and reputable web sites, including those of the Chosun Journal ([chosunjournal.com](http://chosunjournal.com)), the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights ([nknet.org](http://nknet.org)), and the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights ([nkhumanrights.or.kr](http://nkhumanrights.or.kr)). By far the best survey of the overall human rights situation is the annual *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* published by the Seoul-based Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), which covers the categories and provisions of the International Covenants on Human Rights, and references or incorporates up-to-date information and analyses from the U.S. Department of State, press, and NGO accounts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> *Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)*, Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee and Human Rights Watch/Asia, December 1988.

<sup>12</sup> *The People's Korea*, no. 1661 (August 13, 1994), p. 8, as cited in *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 134. (What are described herein and elsewhere as political prisoner camps are proclaimed by *The People's Korea* to be instead “...industrial establishments and cooperative farms animated with creative labor and rows of modern apartment houses and rural houses overflowing with the happiness of the people.”)

<sup>13</sup> This is one reason why in 2003 the U.N. Commission on Human Rights took specific notice of the human rights situation in the DPRK, and explicitly called for more North Korean cooperation with the human rights procedures and mechanisms of the United Nations.

<sup>14</sup> Korea Institute for National Unification, SL Tobong P.O. 22, Seoul 142-600, Republic of Korea.

## Note on Translations

In reviewing the North Korea prison literature available in English and after initially conducting interviews through multiple translators, it became apparent that there is no standard or consistent translation of Korean prison or police terminology into English. Further, North Koreans sometimes use the same word inconsistently. For example, the term *ku-ryu-jang* is used generically by some to mean “detention” and more narrowly by others to mean “a detention room within a police station.” In such cases, the usage employed by the interviewee was retained for this report.

There are also different ways that Korean terms are romanized or transliterated into alphabetically rendered versions of the Korean *hangul* characters.

More problematically, some Korean prison terms are frequently translated in ways that are technically, literally correct but either meaningless or, worse, entirely misleading in English. For example, the term *kwan-li-so* (alternatively transliterated as *gwalliso*) is sometimes literally translated — as in the *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* published annually by the Korea Institute for National Reunification — as “management center,” which sounds rather like a business-consulting firm and is a meaningless translation for a political slave-labor concentration camp. The term *kwan-li-so* is also variously translated as “political-detention camp,” “prison camp,” or “concentration camp,” which are better translations. In this report, the term *kwan-li-so* is translated as “political penal-labor colony,” a more descriptive English rendering.

If the term *kwan-li-so* is meaninglessly translated as “management center,” even more misleading is translating the term *kyo-hwa-so* (alternatively transliterated as *gyohwaso*) as “re-education center,” as was done in the November 2002 Human Rights Watch report, or even as “enlightenment center,” a translation used by some South Koreans. In reality, of course, there is nothing educational, enlightening, or remotely rehabilitative about these “long-term prison-labor camps,” as they are accurately called in this report, since many are characterized by staggeringly high rates of deaths in detention resulting from forced labor under brutal conditions combined with starvation-level food rations.

For ease of reference, this report includes a “Glossary of North Korean Repression” — that is, a chart of common North Korean prison and police terms, listing the Korean characters, the Chinese characters, the formal and common Romanized renderings of the Korean characters, and finally the literal and more descriptive English translations. For clarity, the running text of this report includes the Korean terms used by the interviewees as adjective in front of the descriptive English translation.

Korean names usually appear with the family name followed by the given name, except for a few individuals who have, for English usage, adopted the Anglicized form of their given names and followed these with their family names. For ease of reference, in this report the first time a Korean name is used, it appears with the family name in capital letters and in the form provided when persons were introduced to the interviewer, usually in the Korean fashion (with the family name first).

# INFORMATION BASE

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Former North Korean prisoners and detainees interviewed for this report were detained and/or imprisoned at the following places and times:<sup>15</sup>

## ***Kwan-li-so*** **(Political Penal-Labor Colonies)**

*Kwan-li-so* No. 15  
Yodok, S. Hamgyong Province  
- 1977–1987  
- Nov. 1987–Feb. 1989  
- March 1988–1992  
- April 1995–Jan. 1999

*Kwan-li-so* No. 14  
Kaecheon, S. Pyong-an Province  
- August 1993–Oct. 1995

*Kwan-li-so* No. 18  
Bukchang, S. Pyong-an Province  
- Oct. 1995–Sept. 1998

*Kwan-li-so* No. 105  
Danchun, S. Hamgyong Province  
Mid-1980s (now closed)

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Former North Korean prison guards interviewed for this report were employed at the following:

*Kwan-li-so* No. 22  
Haengyoung (also called Hoeryong), N. Hamgyong Province  
- 1990–1994

*Kwan-li-so* No. 11 (closed in 1989)  
Kyung-sung, N. Hamgyong Province  
- Feb. 1985–June 1986  
- May–August 1987

*Kwan-li-so* No. 13 (closed in 1990)  
Jong Song, N. Hamgyong Province  
- 1987–1989

*Kwan-li-so* No. 26 (closed in 1991)  
Pyongyang  
- briefly between 1986 and 1989

## ***Kyo-hwa-so*** **(Long-Term Prison-Labor Camps)**

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1  
Kaecheon, S. Pyong-an Province  
- Nov. 1987–Dec. 1992  
- early 1993–late 1995

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77  
Danchun, S. Hamgyong Province  
- Sept. 1985–July 1987

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 “Two-Two”  
Oro, S. Hamgyong Province  
- Sept. 1996–Sept. 1997

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 8 “Yongdam”  
Wonsan City, Kangwon Province  
- Early to mid-1980s

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3  
Sinuiju, N. Pyong-an Province  
- Late 1980s–early 1990s

*Kyo-hwa-so*  
Hoeryong, N. Hamgyong Province  
- 1991–1995

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4  
Samdeung-ri, Kangdong, S. Pyong-an Province  
- April 1997–Nov. 1997

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12  
Jeonger-ri, N. Hamgyong Province  
- Dec. 1998–July 1999

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the interviewees who required anonymity also asked that the precise dates of their detentions or imprisonments be withheld from publication.

## INFORMATION BASE (continued)

Former North Korean prisoners and detainees interviewed for this report were detained and/or imprisoned at the following places and times:

### ***Do-jip-kyul-so*** **(Provincial Detention Centers)**

Nongpo, Chongjin City  
North Hamgyong Province  
- Oct. 1986–May 1987  
- December 1997  
- December 1999  
- May 2000  
- Mid-2000  
- July–Sept. 2000

Sinuiju, N. Pyong-an Province  
- Dec. 1999  
- Jan. 2000  
- May–June 2000

Musan, N. Hamgyong Province  
- August–Dec. 1987  
- June 2000

Hyesan, Yang-gang Province  
- Nov. 1990–Jan. 1991

Onsong, N. Hamgyong Province  
- Sept. 2000

### ***Ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae*** **(Labor-Training Camps)**

Onsong, N. Hamgyong Province  
- Jan.–Sept. 1996  
- June 2000

Youngkwang-kun,  
S. Hamgyong Province  
- Oct. 2000

## INFORMATION BASE (continued)

Former North Korean prisoners and detainees interviewed for this report were detained and/or imprisoned at the following places and times:

### ***Ka-mok (Police Jails) and Ku-ryu-jang (Police Detention Facilities)***

Maram (NSA/SSPA), Pyongyang

- Early–Mid 1993
- Nov. 1994–April 1995
- Jan. 1996–Nov. 1997
- March–Sept. 1997

Moonsu (NSA/SSPA), Pyongyang

- Early–Mid 1993

Onsong (NSA/SSPA), N. Hamgyong Province

- March–June 1997
- June 2000
- August 2000
- Dec. 2001

Onsong (PSA/SSA), N. Hamgyong Province

- March–June 1997
- Seven months in 1999
- Oct.–Nov. 1999
- Sept. 2000

Chongjin (NSA/SSPA), N. Hamgyong Province

- Dec. 1987–March 1988
- Three months in 2000

Chongjin (PSA/SSA), N. Hamgyong Province

- May–Nov. 1987
- Dec. 2001–Feb. 2002

Hyeryong (NSA/SSPA), N. Hamgyong Province

- July 2001

Hyesan (PSA/SSA), Yang-gang Province

- Early 1991

Hamju-kun (PSA/SSA), S. Hamgyong Province

- Jan. 1993

Myungchun-kun (PSA/SSA), N. Hamgyong Province

- Jan.–July 1993

Sambong, Musan, (NSA/SSPA), N. Hamgyong Province

- July 2001

Nam Min Dang (NSA/SSPA), Sinuiju, N. Pyong-an Province

- Dec. 1999

Sinuiju (NSA/SSPA), N. Pyong-an Province

- Nov.–Dec. 1999

NSA/SSPA = *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency / Social Safety Protection Agency)

PSA/SSA = *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency); before 1998, *Sa-hoe-an-jeon-bu* (Social Safety Agency)

## **GLOSSARY OF NORTH KOREAN REPRESSION\***

<b>Korean</b>	관리소	교화소	집결소	노동단련대	감옥	구류장
<b>Chinese</b>	管理所	教化所	集結所	勞動鍛鍊隊	監獄	拘留場
<b>Colloquial Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	kwan-li-so	kyo-hwa-so	jip-kyul-so	ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae	ka-mok	ku-ryu-jang
<b>Formal Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	gwalliso	gyohwaso	jipkyulso	nodong danryeon dae	gamok	guryujang
<b>Literal English</b>	control and manage place	a place to make a good person through reeducation	gathering place	labor-training corps	jail	detention facility
<b>Descriptive English</b>	political penal-labor colony	long-term prison labor camp	labor/detention facility	labor/detention facility	jail (often pre-sentence detention)	interrogation facility

\* The Korean characters in this chart are based on Chinese characters, which may vary in their construction and meaning.

## GLOSSARY OF NORTH KOREAN REPRESSION (continued)

<b>Korean</b>	국가보위부	사회안전부	인민보안성
<b>Chinese</b>	國家保衛部	社會安全部	人民保安省
<b>Colloquial Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu	Sa-hoe-an-jeon-bu	In-min-bo-an-seong
<b>Formal Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	Gukgabowibu	Sahoeanjeonbu	Inminboanseong
<b>Literal English</b>	National Security Agency	Social Safety Agency (pre-1998)	People's Safety Agency (post-1998)
<b>Descriptive English</b>	National Security Police	police	police

<b>Korean</b>	고문	공개사형	영아살해	강제낙태	연좌제
<b>Chinese</b>	拷問	公開死形	嬰兒殺害	強制落胎	連坐制
<b>Colloquial Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	go-mun	gong-gae-sa- hyeong	yeong-a-sal-hae	gang-je-nak-tae	yeon-jwa-je
<b>Formal Korean Phonetic Romanization</b>	gomun	gonggae sahyeong	yeongasalhae	gangjenaktae	yeonjwaje
<b>Literal English</b>	torture	public execution	killing babies	forced abortion	association system
<b>Descriptive English</b>	torture	public execution	infanticide	involuntary abortion	guilt by association



## PART ONE

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### THE NORTH KOREAN GULAG I: KWAN-LI-SO POLITICAL PENAL-LABOR COLONIES

#### Introduction: Generations Imprisoned without Trial

North Korea's *kwan-li-so* consist of a series of sprawling encampments measuring kilometers long and kilometers wide. The number of these encampments has varied over time. They are located, mostly, in the valleys between high mountains, mostly, in the northern provinces of North Korea. There are between 5,000 and 50,000 prisoners per *kwan-li-so*, totaling perhaps some 150,000 to 200,000 prisoners throughout North Korea.<sup>16</sup> Both perceived wrongdoers and up to three generations of their extended families are “arrested,” or, more accurately, abducted by police authorities and deposited in the *kwan-li-so*, without any judicial process or legal recourse whatsoever, for lifetime sentences of extremely hard labor in mining, timber-cutting, or farming enterprises. The prisoners live under brutal conditions in permanent situations of deliberately contrived semi-starvation.

The *kwan-li-so* are usually surrounded at their outer perimeters by barbed-wire fences punctuated with guard towers and patrolled by heavily armed guards. The encampments include self-contained, closed “village” compounds for single persons, usually the alleged wrongdoers, and other closed, fenced-in “villages” for the extended families of the wrongdoers. Some of the camps are divided into sections called *wan-jeon-tong-je-kyuk* (total-control zones), where the sentences are lifetime, and sections called *hyuk-myung-hwa-kyuk* (best translated as “revolutionizing zones”), so-called “re-education” areas from which prisoners eventually can be released. In the total-control zones, if the families are together, only privileged prisoners are allowed to marry and have children. With the only known exception of Camp No. 18,<sup>17</sup> prisoners have no correspondence or contact with the world outside the political penal-labor colony, except for news provided by newly arriving prisoners. The *kwan-li-so* are also sometimes referred to as *teuk-byeol-dok-je-dae-sang-gu-yeok*, which translates as “zones under special dictatorship.”

The most strikingly abnormal feature of the *kwan-li-so* system is the philosophy of “collective responsibility,” or “guilt by association” — *yeon-jwa-je* — whereby the mother and father, sisters and brothers, children and sometimes grandchildren of the offending political prisoner are imprisoned in a three-generation practice. Former prisoners and guards trace this practice to a 1972 statement by “Great Leader” Kim Il Sung: “Factionalists or enemies of class, whoever they are, their seed must be eliminated through three generations.” According to the testimony of a former guard at *Kwan-li-so* No. 11 at Kyung-sung, North Hamgyong Province, this slogan was carved in wood in the prison guards’ headquarters building. According to the testimony of YOON Dae Il, a former police official, the number of family members abducted and sent to the lifetime labor camps depends on the severity of the presumed political offense.

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<sup>16</sup> The 200,000 figure comes from a former guard, AHN Myong Chol, who previously worked at four different prison camps. YOON Dae Il, a former official of the *bo-wi-bu* National Security Agency, the police organization that administers the prison camps, says the 200,000 figure is “the minimum.”

<sup>17</sup> See description of *Kwan-li-so* No. 18 below.

The other strikingly abnormal characteristic of the *kwan-li-so* system is that prisoners are not arrested, charged (that is, told of their offense), or tried in any sort judicial procedure, where they would have a chance to confront their accusers or offer a defense with or even without benefit of legal counsel. The presumed offender is simply picked up and taken to an interrogation facility and frequently tortured to “confess” before being sent to the political penal-labor colony. The family members are also just picked up and deposited at the *kwan-li-so*, without ever being told of the whereabouts or wrongdoings of the presumed wrongdoer.

The most salient feature of day-to-day prison-labor camp life is the combination of below-subsistence food rations and extremely hard labor. Prisoners are provided only enough food to be kept perpetually on the verge of starvation. And prisoners are compelled by their hunger to eat, if they can get away with it, the food of the labor-camp farm animals, plants, grasses, bark, rats, snakes — anything remotely edible. It should be noted that below-subsistence-level food rations preceded, by decades, the severe nationwide food shortages experienced by North Korea in the 1990s.

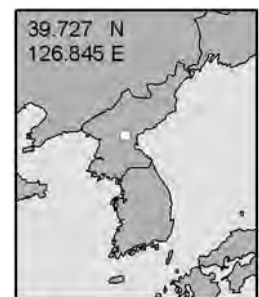
Many of the *kwan-li-so* involve mining for coal, iron deposits, gold, or various other ores, or logging and wood-cutting in the adjacent mountains. Prisoners undertake farm labor during planting and harvesting seasons. This back-breaking labor is often performed twelve or more hours per day, seven days per week, with time off only for national holidays (such as New Year’s Day and Kim Il Sung’s and Kim Jong Il’s birthdays, for example).

Except for the “revolutionizing zone,” in *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 Yodok, and possibly a section of *Kwan-li-so* No. 18, these camps do not feature “re-education,” as it is not anticipated that the prisoners will be returned to society. Punishment for rule infractions or working too slowly include further reduction in food rations, or detention within punishment cells that do not have enough space for a person to completely lie down or stand up, causing the loss of circulation and atrophy of legs and often leading to death within several weeks. The combination of below-subsistence-level food rations and slave-labor working conditions leads to large numbers of deaths in detention. Persons who try to escape and other major rule-breakers are publicly executed by hanging or firing squad in front of the assembled prisoners of that section of the camp. (The former guards say they feared and hated the public executions because, heavily armed as they were, they still worried that the rarely assembled inmates might riot.)

Former prisoners — mostly those from the “revolutionizing zone,” at *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 Yodok — and former prison guards report that upon arrival, they were struck by the shortness, skinniness, premature aging, hunchbacks, and physical deformities of so many of the prisoners. They also report that there were large numbers of amputees and persons disabled from work accidents, and persons with partial amputations owing to frostbite of the toes, feet, fingers, and hands.

Semi-starvation yields large numbers of informants among the prisoners, leading to a prison culture of distrust and hostility. Prisoners fight each other over scraps of food or over the clothing of deceased inmates. The camps feature the gamut of abnormal and aberrant human behavior that results from treating people like animals.

Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok



Originally, the *kwan-li-so* were run by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency), regular police forces that are part of the Ministry of Interior (before 1998 called the *Sa-hoe-an-jeon-bu*, meaning Social Safety Agency). Except for *Kwan-li-so* No. 18 in South Pyong-an Province, administration of the prison-labor camps was taken over by *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (usually abbreviated as “*bo-wi-bu*”), variously translated as the National Security Agency, National Security Police, State Political Protection Agency, or State Safety and Protection Agency. This security force was created in 1973 and reports, according to former *bo-wi-bu* official Yoon Dae Il, directly to Kim Jong Il, not to the Ministry of Interior or Defense, and that took over running the *kwan-li-so*, except for No. 18. The outer perimeters of the *kwan-li-so* are patrolled by privileged members of North Korea's army. The administrator and internal guards of the camps are *bo-wi-bu* officers.

There has been a gradual consolidation of the *kwan-li-so*, according to former guards and police officials. Originally there were more than a dozen, but several have been closed, for a variety of reasons — primarily for being too close in proximity to the China border — and the prisoners transferred to other camps. According to former police officials, there are now six *kwan-li-so* in operation. Four of these six were confirmed by persons interviewed for this report.

Virtually all of the prisoners in the *kwan-li-so* are victims of “arbitrary detention,” as defined by international norms and by the official deliberations of international authorities such as the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

## Who Are the Political Prisoners?

The pattern of incarceration of political prisoners in North Korea has followed a trajectory that should be familiar to students of communist rule: imprisonments of reactionaries were followed by waves of purges of the Korean Workers' Party, the army, and the state bureaucracies; the camps then became economically productive dumping-grounds for elements of North Korea's society that did not fit into the “Kim Il Sung nation.”

Primitive prison-labor camps in North Korea initially were set up immediately after World War II, for predictable or potential enemies of the revolution: landowners, collaborators with the Japanese occupation, religious leaders, and some family members of those individuals who went south after the Soviet/American creation of northern and southern Korean areas. Following the Korean War, suspected collaborators with the American and South Korean forces were imprisoned.

As Kim Il Sung consolidated power, various factions of the Korean Workers' Party, the state bureaucracy, and the army were purged and imprisoned. The highest-level Korean Workers' Party official to defect to South Korea stated that “complete-control zones” were established after 1956 for “purged factionalists.”<sup>18</sup> Korea scholar Charles Armstrong notes, “By the 1960s, the former Manchurian partisans [anti-colonial guerrillas, including Kim Il Sung] were at the apex of the power system in the DPRK, and those who had been aligned with the Southern Workers' Party, the Soviets, and the

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<sup>18</sup> See *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, 2003, KINU, Seoul, 177–180.

Chinese in Yan'an had almost all been purged, executed, sent into exile, or otherwise eliminated from positions of power.”<sup>19</sup> Other purges of the Party, the army, and state bureaucracy coincided with the development of the “cult of personality” around Kim Il Sung, and even more purges and imprisonment accompanied the feudal-dynastic succession of Kim Jong Il, the first son of Kim Il Sung’s first wife.

Also imprisoned were various categories of people who did not fit into the Party’s plan for the country, and those perceived as posing a threat to the regime should they remain in society. Included here were a large number of Japanese citizens of Korean ethnic descent whose families had been taken to Japan for forced labor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the Japanese occupation of Korea, but who returned to North Korea in the 1950s and 1960s. They were later deemed to have been spoiled by their exposure to Japanese liberalism and capitalist prosperity.<sup>20</sup>

When North Korea adopted a three-tiered *seongbun* — a political/class structure — of “loyal,” “wavering,” and “hostile” classes, divided, in turn, into fifty-one subcategories, and the entire population was registered into one of the fifty-one subcategories,<sup>21</sup> some of those classified within the “hostile” subgroups are believed to have been imprisoned. (However, many of the “purged” North Korean officials noted above would have come from “good” *seongbun* family backgrounds.)

The *seongbun* system provides an important insight into the contemporary North Korean prison-camp system. As Professor Armstrong notes:

Social stratification had been one of the most enduring characteristics of Korean society before the twentieth century...The **hereditary** [emphasis added] three-tiered structure...that became explicit in North Korea from the 1960s onward was based on the actions of oneself or one’s ancestors during the colonial period and the Korean War. Such stratification was made possible by the careful categorization of all North Korean citizens by social strata beginning in 1946 and resonated with the three-class structure of yangban [scholar/bureaucratic aristocracy], commoner, and outcast/slave that dominated Choson [the feudal dynasty that ruled Korea for centuries prior to the Japanese occupation of Korea] society.<sup>22</sup>

The “outcast/slave” characteristic is clearly apparent in the description of the lifetime-sentence, “three-generation” *kwan-li-so* described in this report.

In the 1990s, imprisonment also befell some North Korean students and diplomats who had been studying or posted to the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe and had been exposed to the collapse of socialist rule. Also imprisoned were others who were perceived to be potential complainers and persons who purposely or inadvertently did not take

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<sup>19</sup> Charles K. Armstrong. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950*. (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 241. Bracketed explanations provided by David Hawk.

<sup>20</sup> See the story of KANG Chol Hwan below.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on the *seongbun* citizen classification system, see *Kim Il-Song’s North Korea*, Helen-Louise Hunter, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1999), Chapter One, 3–13.

<sup>22</sup> Armstrong, op. cit. 72–73. Bracketed explanations provided by David Hawk.

proper care of photographs of the “Great Leader,” Kim Il Sung, or the “Dear Leader,” Kim Jong Il, or even of newspapers that contained photographs of the father and son.

Some South Korean experts posit that these camps also became places where un-repatriated South Korean prisoners of war were dumped after the Korean War, as were a much smaller number of South Korean POWs who were captured by the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese during the American-Vietnamese war and turned over by the Vietnamese to North Korea.<sup>23</sup> Also believed to have been placed in the prison system were a larger number of South Koreans, including many fishermen, who were captured or abducted by North Korea over the years, and a smaller number of Japanese citizens who were abducted from Japan by North Korea for various reasons.

## How Do We Know?

In their 1972 textbook, *Communism in Korea*, Professors Robert Scalapino and Chong Sik Lee noted that two camps had been set up and named after the number of the proclamations that brought them into existence: one camp for perceived political wrongdoers and another camp for their families.<sup>24</sup>

In 1974, the situation of the North Korean prison camps became known in international human rights circles when Amnesty International campaigned for the release of Ali Lamada, a citizen of Venezuela, and Jacques Sedillot, a citizen of France, both of whom had been recruited to work in North Korea by the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs translating the collected works of Kim Il Sung into Spanish and French, respectively. Following the release of Ali Lamada, Amnesty published in 1979 his account of his imprisonment — to the interviewer’s knowledge the first English-language North Korean political-prisoner account to introduce the North Korean prison-camp system to an international audience. Lamada’s story of his imprisonment from 1967 to 1974, except for his nationality, is so remarkably similar to the stories of recently escaped North Koreans, it is worth recounting on the following pages<sup>25</sup> as it establishes the similarity of the mistreatment of political prisoners over a thirty-year period. While imprisoned at Sariwon prison-labor camp, Lamada learned from guards and “orderlies,” who were privileged prisoners, some of whom had been held previously in other prison-labor camps, of some twenty other prison-labor camps holding, Lamada calculated, at that time roughly 150,000 prisoners altogether.<sup>26</sup>

Over a number of years, a small number of North Korean defectors to South Korea provided information on the prison-camp system, which was collected by Republic of Korea government agencies, scholars, and specialists. The first major international human rights NGO report on North Korea, *Human Rights in the DPRK (North Korea)*, was published in December 1988 by the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee and Human Rights Watch/Asia. It outlined the camp system, albeit with very little corroboration by prisoner testimony, in the course of a review of the various provisions of the North Korean constitution and legal system.

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<sup>23</sup> See Prof. HEO Man Ho, “North Korea’s Continued Detention of South Korean POWs since the Korean and Vietnam Wars,” *The Korean Journal of Defense and Analysis*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Fall 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in *Human Rights in the DPRK (North Korea)*. Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee/Human Rights Watch, December 1988, Minneapolis/Washington, D.C., 103.

<sup>25</sup> See pages 29–30 below.

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International Index: ASA 24/02/79.

Prisoner testimony started to emerge publicly in the mid-1990s, after two former prisoners from the “revolutionizing zone” of *Kwan-li-so* No. 15, often called Yodok, KANG Chol Hwan and AN Hyuk, escaped to South Korea via China in 1992 and published their prison memoirs in Seoul. In 1994, a former prison guard who had worked at four different prison-labor camps, AHN Myong Chol, defected to South Korea and was able to provide a great deal of firsthand information. In 1996, the Seoul-based Korea Institute of National Unification (KINU) began publishing annually a *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, which contains reporting that draws on the extensive interviews conducted by the South Korean government with all North Koreans provided asylum by the Republic of Korea.

In the late 1990s, as the production and distribution system in North Korea broke down, larger numbers of Koreans fled to China, primarily in search of food. Some of these food and/or asylum seekers had been imprisoned in either the *kwan-li-so* or the *kyo-hwa-so*. A number of those who fled to China, particularly after 2000, made their way to South Korea, and published accounts or interviews in South Korean journals or magazines.

An important development occurred in December 2002, when the weekly news magazine *Far Eastern Economic Review* published satellite photographs of *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 at Haengyong (also called Hoeryong) in North Hamgyong Province. Both the United States and South Korean governments have long had even better satellite photographs of the prison-labor camps. (When Kang Chol Hwan first came to Seoul in 1992, he was shown satellite photos of the *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 Yodok so precise that he was able to pick out his former house in the images.) But these intelligence agencies have never released their photographs to the press or public. John Larkin, a Seoul-based, Korean-speaking then-correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, was able to obtain coordinates of latitude and longitude of *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 from old Soviet-made maps of North Korea on which, in consultation with former guard Ahn Myong Chol, Larkin was able to precisely locate the sprawling encampment at Haengyong. After Larkin obtained satellite photos from a commercial firm, Ahn was able to locate and identify buildings at the penal-labor colony.<sup>27</sup>

## WITNESSES AND TESTIMONY

### WITNESS: Ali Lamada: Sariwon, Hwanghae Province



As noted in the preceding section, Ali Lamada and Jacques Sedillot were recruited in 1967 by the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and placed in the Department of Publications to translate the writings of Kim Il Sung into Spanish and French, respectively. Lamada’s poetry and books were well known in the Spanish-speaking world, and he was an active member of the Venezuelan Communist Party.

Both Lamada and Sedillot were arrested in September 1967. Sedillot was accused of being a French imperialist spy. No charges were initially brought against Lamada. He

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<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea has obtained satellite photographs of several additional prisons and concentration/slave-labor camps for inclusion in this report.

was simply ordered and coerced to confess by means of solitary confinement in a 2-meter by 1-meter by 3-meter cell (7 feet by 3 feet by 10 feet) in the Ministry of Interior for a year on below-subsistence-level food rations. During this time, he lost 22 kilos (more than 50 pounds) and his body became covered with sores.

After a year, Lamada was returned to his residence in Pyongyang and placed under house arrest but was picked up two months later and sentenced to twenty years of forced labor, purportedly for being a spy. He was driven some three hours from Pyongyang and thrown into a punishment cell in a prison camp, where, kept handcuffed for three weeks, he slept on the floor without blanket or mattress in freezing temperatures. Transferred to the main prison-camp buildings, he was locked in unheated rooms and suffered frostbite of the feet. His toenails dropped off, and his feet became covered with sores. From guards, he learned that the name of the prison camp was Sariwon, where some 6,000 to 8,000 prisoners worked twelve hours per day assembling jeep parts. A doctor told Lamada that there was a special section of the prison camp where 1,200 sick persons were held.

The government of Venezuela and the President of Romania intervened on behalf of Lamada, and both he and Sedillot were released in May 1974. But Sedillot died in Pyongyang of prison-related illnesses before he could return to France. Lamada recuperated in Eastern Europe before returning to Venezuela, where he published his account of his experience in the North Korean prisons and Sariwon prison-labor camp.<sup>28</sup>

### **WITNESS: KANG Chol Hwan: *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 “Yodok” (1977–1987)**



KANG Chol Hwan was born in Pyongyang in 1968. His Korean–Japanese grandfather, who made a fortune in Japanese *pachinko* parlors (pinball/slot machine casinos), and his Korean–Japanese grandmother, a stalwart supporter of Kim Il Sung’s Korean Workers’ Party, had voluntarily repatriated to Pyongyang to contribute to the building of socialism in North Korea. Gradually the bank accounts, cars, and furniture the family had brought with them to Korea were seized.

One day Kang’s grandfather simply disappeared without word or trace. Several weeks later, agents came to Kang’s father’s home, announced that the grandfather had committed an (unspecified) act of high treason, and took the entire family — except for Kang’s mother, who, coming from a high political family herself, was required to divorce Kang’s father at that point — to *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 at Yodok. Initially the family had no idea where they were. The sign above the entry gate said only “Border Patrol of the Korean People, Unit 2915.” Subsequently, they learned that they were in a guarded “village” surrounded by barbed wire and reserved for the families of ethnic Koreans from Japan who had voluntarily repatriated to North Korea. They also learned that they were in the rehabilitable section — that is, the “revolutionizing zone” — of a sprawling prison-labor camp. Three years later, they learned from a prisoner who had been transferred into Yodok *kwan-li-so* from Sengho-ri *kwan-li-so*, some forty miles from Pyongyang, that Kang’s grandfather had been at the Sengho-ri *kwan-li-so*.

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<sup>28</sup> This account is drawn from “Ali Lamada: A Personal Account of the Experience of a Prisoner of Conscience in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” Amnesty International: ASA 24/02/79.

Kang was imprisoned from age nine to nineteen in what is North Korea's most well-known political prison-labor camp. After being released without explanation in 1987 (Kang suspects that his grandfather had died), Kang lived in several places in North Korea. He eventually met up with another former prisoner, AN Hyuk, whom he had first met in Yodok, and the two of them fled North Korea, going to Yanji, Shenyang, Beijing, and finally Dalian, from where, in 1992, they went by boat to South Korea.

In Seoul, Kang co-authored with historian Pierre Rigolout a superlative and ably translated prison memoir, *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*,<sup>29</sup> the first detailed account of a North Korean prison-labor camp to be published in the West. The book describes the horrible life at Yodok without losing the sense of puzzlement with which a young boy, subsequently a teenager, attempted to comprehend the perniciously bizarre situation in which he grew up. Today, Kang is a reporter for *Chosun Ilbo*, a large daily newspaper in Seoul.

### WITNESS: AN Hyuk, *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 “Yodok” (1987–1989)



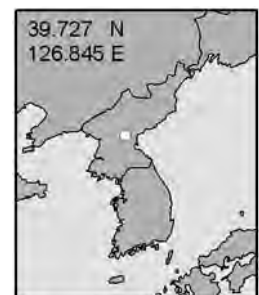
AN Hyuk was born at Manpo City, Jakang Province, in 1968 into a loyal party family. At the age of twelve, he received a government scholarship to a school for physical education. In 1986, when he was nineteen, after ice skating in Hysean near Mt. Paekdu on the Chinese border, An crossed into China largely out of curiosity. Arrested in China, he was repatriated to North Korea. He was detained for one year and eight months in solitary confinement in an undersized, underground cell in the Maram *ku-ryu-jang* (detention facility) at Yongsong, Pyongyang, and for another year and a half at the Daesuk-ri singles prison area at Yodok, one of the villages in the “revolutionizing” section of *Kwan-li-so* No. 15.

While at Maram, An was subjected to sleep-deprivation and compelled to sit motionless for days. He saw only forty other detainees but believes there were as many as 1,000. Among those in nearby cells were prisoners detained for spilling ink on or failing to adequately dust photographs of Kim Il Sung, charges even the prison guards regarded as lacking seriousness. An relates that when he was transferred to Yodok, the guards there told him that he had been sitting down for too long and that it was time for him to do some work. During his year and a half at Yodok, there were some 2,000 prisoners in the Daesuk-ri singles section of the prison camp.

At Yodok, An's first labor assignment was construction work at a water-driven electric-power plant at the camp. His duties entailed breaking ice and wading waist-deep into a frozen stream to gather stones, and laying boards to re-channel the water. It was literally a “murderous” construction project, as scores died from exposure, and even more lost fingers and toes to frostbite. His next work assignment was cutting down and carrying from high mountains rare hardwood trees for export to Japan. Deaths resulted from injuries during this project as well. His last work project was gathering wild mushrooms in the mountains, also for export.

<sup>29</sup> Kang Chol Hwan and Pierre Rigolout. *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*. (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2001); originally published in France as *Les Aquariums de Pyongyang*. (Editions Robert Laffont, 2000).

Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok





In 1992, An escaped to Seoul along with fellow former Yodok prisoner Kang Chol Hwan. In 1995, Chongji Media in Seoul published his Korean-language prison memoirs, *Yodok List*.

### **WITNESS: KIM Tae Jin, *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 “Yodok” (1988–1992)**



KIM Tae Jin was born in 1956 in China, where his father worked in the Chinese military. He returned with his mother to North Korea in 1961. After reaching adulthood, he worked in a leather factory in South Pyong-an Province. In 1986, he went to visit relatives in China and stayed for eighteen months before being arrested, in July 1987. In mid-August he was repatriated to the Musan-kun *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) detention center in Chongjin, where he was tortured during interrogation. After four months, he was transferred to the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police *ku-ryu-jang* (interrogation facility) in Chongjin, where he was again tortured during interrogation and accused of treason, even though he had gone to China only to visit family. He was beaten, deprived of sleep, and forced to kneel or sit motionless for hours on end. Because Kim was not permitted to wash, the fleas and lice in the jail cells were as bad a problem as the torture and freezing cold temperatures.

In March 1988, Kim was sent to the *hyuk-myung-hwa-kyuk* (revolutionizing process zone) of Daesuk-ri section at Yodok, where he was imprisoned for four years and six months, until April 1992. At Yodok, he farmed corn, cut trees into firewood, and made furniture.

After having spent eight months in confinement in provincial jail cells, Kim thought Yodok an improvement in that he was at least allowed to move around. But food rations were meager, consisting of steamed salty corn dishes — and this was before famine conditions afflicted North Korea. To stay alive, he ate plants and grasses, rats, snakes, and frogs. Kim saw deaths from malnutrition and related diseases “every week.” He also personally witnessed five public executions of persons who attempted to escape. While at Yodok, he was beaten and forced to endure a sit-down-stand-up punishment until he could barely sit up. Even though Yodok was a “living hell,” he still regarded these as the “golden years” for prisoners at Yodok compared with what longer-term prisoners told him about previous conditions.

After four and a half years, Kim was released. His wife divorced and denounced him. After five years, he became convinced things would never improve for him in North Korea and fled to China. He came to Seoul in June 2001 via Mongolia.

## WITNESS: LEE Young Kuk, *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 “Yodok” (1995–1999)



LEE Young Kuk was born in 1962 in Musan, North Hamgyong Province, into a politically loyal family. During his ten years of compulsory military service, from 1978 to 1988, he became a bodyguard to Kim Jong Il and got to know the “Dear Leader” personally. After returning to his hometown in 1988, Lee was struck by the discrepancies between the lifestyles of the privileged in Pyongyang and the living conditions of the people of Musan. Still, from 1991 to 1994, he was sent to the Central Military College in Pyongyang, after which time he was posted to a senior party position in Musan

District. Because of his privileged status, he had a radio capable of receiving KBS (South Korean radio) broadcasts. Soon he became disillusioned with the political indoctrination he had been taught at the Military College, and from the KBS broadcasts, he came to believe that South Korea had become a real democracy with real freedom.

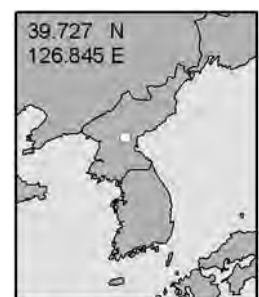
In 1994, Lee fled to China hoping to defect to South Korea. However, he was discovered missing, and because of his personal knowledge of the “Dear Leader,” North Korean security agents chased after him. Entrapped in Beijing and wrongly thinking he was talking to a South Korean diplomat who could assist with his defection, Lee confessed his true opinions about the North Korean regime. Under the impression that he was being escorted to the South Korean Embassy, he was whisked instead into the Embassy of North Korea, where he was bound, drugged, and put on a plane to Pyongyang.

Lee was held in Pyongyang for six months in an underground detention cell by the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police. He was subjected to kneeling torture (made to kneel motionless, not even turning his head, for hours at a time) and water torture (held down by five or six agents who poured water into his mouth and nose until he gagged and suffocated) and was severely beaten on the shins, eyes, ears, head, and mouth. Six of his teeth and one of his ear drums were broken. Years later, he still suffers double-vision in his left eye and his shins are still black and blue. Lee believes his torture was solely intended as punishment for having fled to China. While in Beijing, he had freely expressed unfavorable opinions about the regime, leaving no further information for the North Korean police to beat out of him.

Because other members of his family continued to serve Kim Jong Il — one of his cousins was one of Kim’s chauffeurs — Lee’s family was not punished along with him. In March 1995, Lee alone was sent to a singles camp in the *hyuk-myung-hwa-kyuk* (revolutionizing process) section of Yodok, where he quarried stones for fourteen hours each day for four years. Before his capture in Beijing, he weighed 94 kilos (207 pounds). While at Yodok, he also cut logs, cleared rocks, and farmed. Released from Yodok in January 1999, Lee weighed 58 kilos (128 pounds). Lee believes that when he was released, it was on Kim Jong Il’s personal intervention.

In April 1999, Lee again fled to China and reached South Korea in May 2000, smuggled aboard a ship from Dalian with three other North Koreans. Nearly two years passed before Lee was willing and able to tell his story. He had arranged during that time for an ethnic Korean in China to go to Musan to tell his parents that he was in Seoul, but

Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok



his parents had either disappeared or were somewhere in detention. So, Lee decided to tell his story in South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

### **TESTIMONY: *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 “Yodok,” South Hamgyong Province**

Yodok is the most well-documented *kwan-li-so* in North Korea, because, in addition to having a lifetime-imprisonment “total-control zone,” it also has a “revolutionizing zone,” which operates more like the *kyo-hwa-so* prisons, described later in this report, in that prisoners can be released back into the larger society. The four former prisoners profiled above were all in the “revolutionizing zone.” Their accounts of Yodok cover almost all of the years from 1977 to 1999.

Kang Chol Hwan, who entered Yodok in 1977, remembers a sign at the front gate of the colony reading “Border Patrol Unit 2915.” The colony is bound to the north by Mt. Paek (1,742 meters, or 5,715 feet, high), to the northeast by Mt. Modo (1,833 meters, or 6,014 feet, high), to the west by Mt. Tok (1,250 meters, or 4,101 feet, high) and to the south by Mt. Byoungpung (1,152 meters, or 3,780 feet, high). The valley is entered from the east by the 1,250-meter (4,101-foot) Chaebong Pass. The streams from the valleys of these mountains form the Ipsok River, which flows downstream into the Yonghung River, which flows into the sea near Wonsan City.

According to An Hyuk, Yodok, which is shorthand for Yodok-kun, an area of land measurement within a province that would be comparable to a district or county, is located in South Hamgyong Province. Yodok-kun<sup>30</sup> contains twenty ri<sup>31</sup> (also sometimes transliterated as “li” or “ni”), five of which comprise Yodok. The revolutionizing zones include Ipsok-ri (or Yipsok-ri), Knup-ri (or Gnup-ri) for Korean families from Japan, and Daesuk-ri (or Taesuk-ri), where An, Lee, and Kim were held in “singles” villages. Other sections include Pyongchang-ri, a punishment or detention area within the prison camp called Yongpyong-ri, a secluded killing area called Kouek, and other areas for prisoners serving lifetime sentences.

The whole encampment is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence measuring 3 to 4 meters (10 to 13 feet) in height. In some areas there are walls 2 to 3 meters (7 to 10 feet) tall topped with electrical wire. Along the fence there are watchtowers measuring 7 to 8 meters (23 to 26 feet) in height, set at 1-kilometer (0.62-mile) intervals, and patrolled by 1,000 guards armed with automatic rifles and hand grenades. Additionally, there are teams with guard dogs. Inside the camp, each village has two guards on duty at all times.<sup>32</sup>

During An Hyuk’s year-and-a-half imprisonment, there were some 30,000 prisoners in the lifetime area, and 1,300 singles and 9,300 family members in the revolutionizing zone along with some 5,900 Koreans, including Kang’s family, who had voluntarily repatriated from Japan but were later judged not to fit into the “Kim Il Sung nation.”<sup>33</sup> By the time of Kim Tae Jin’s release from Yodok in 1992, the number of persons in the revolutionizing zone had decreased to somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 because of

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<sup>30</sup> “Kun” may be translated as a large North Korean administrative unit.

<sup>31</sup> “Ri” may be translated as a small North Korean administrative unit.

<sup>32</sup> These figures come from pages 48–59 in An Hyuk’s *Yodok List*, translated into English in *Life and Human Rights in North Korea*, Volume 1, Autumn 1996, a publication of the Citizen’s Alliance for Human Rights in North Korea, Seoul, 18–19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

releases of prisoners to society and because of larger numbers of transfers of prisoners to the lifetime-imprisonment zones.

According to Kang Chol Hwan, labor operations at the Knup-ri section of Yodok included a gypsum quarry and a re-opened gold mine (which was originally opened during the Japanese occupation of Korea), where some 800 men worked in groups of five. Assignments in these mines were considered the worst form of labor because of the frequency of work accidents there. The section for ethnic Koreans who had voluntarily repatriated from Japan also had textile plants; a distillery for corn, acorn, and snake brandy; and a coppersmith workshop. The prisoners raised rabbits for the lining of soldiers' winter coats, worked on agricultural teams, and were periodically organized to look for hardwoods and gather wild ginseng in the forest hillsides.

During Kang's ten-year imprisonment there were somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 persons in his village, and about one hundred deaths per year from malnutrition and disease, particularly from severe diarrhea leading to dehydration.

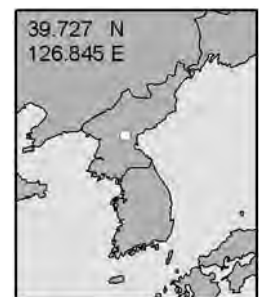
While Kang's was a family village, sexual contact between men and women was not allowed, as it was thought this could result in another generation of counter-revolutionaries. Such contact did occur, of course, but, with two exceptions in ten years, all pregnancies were forcibly aborted. The involved men would be physically punished and the women would be humiliated by being compelled to recount their sexual encounters to the entire village.

Kang's village was a "revolutionizing" village, so it included "re-education," which basically consisted of readings from *Rodong Shinmun*, the Workers' Party newspaper.

The singles area in Daesuk-ri was described by Lee Young Kuk as a valley 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) long by 0.5 kilometers (0.3 miles) wide next to a small 600–700-meter high (1,969–2,297-foot) mountain. During Lee's imprisonment, the area held roughly 1,000 prisoners, of which only 50 were women. The women's cells were heated, but the men's were not, so men prisoners suffered from frostbitten ears and swollen legs during the winter months. Roughly 200 prisoners died each year during the four years when Lee was imprisoned, mostly from starvation and related disease. But there were always new arrivals each month.

Both areas within Yodok where Kang, Lee, An, and Kim were imprisoned, Knup-ri and Daesuk-ri, had public executions by hanging and shootings — and sometimes worse — for prisoners who had tried to escape or who had been caught "stealing" food. Lee witnessed one public killing of an attempted escapee, HAHN Seung Chul, who was tied and dragged behind a car in front of the assembled prisoners until dead, after which time the other prisoners were required to pass by and place their hands on his bloodied corpse. Another prisoner, AHN Sung Eun, shouted out against this atrocity, and he was immediately shot to death. Kim witnessed a public execution by firing squad after which the assembled prisoners were required to pass by and throw a stone at the corpse still slumped and hanging from the post to which the victim had been tied. Several women prisoners fainted as they were pressed to further mutilate the corpse. Kang witnessed some fifteen executions during his ten years at Knup-ri.

Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok



Nonetheless, according to Kang, prisoners who were brought to Yodok from other *kwan-li-so* said it was much better there than at their previous prison-labor camps. He reports that several prisoners committed suicide before they were to be transferred to other camps, where they feared they would just die a slow death.

*See pages 90 to 100 for satellite photographs of Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok.*

### **WITNESS: KIM Yong, *Kwan-li-so* No. 14 and No. 18**



KIM Yong was born in 1950 in Hwanghae Province. When he was seven years old, unbeknownst to him at the time, his father and older brother were executed as spies for the United States. To spare him the collective guilt attributed by North Korean officials to the families of political wrongdoers, Kim's mother placed him in an orphanage under a false name. Kim grew up to become the Korean equivalent of a lieutenant colonel in the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police. Like other military and security units and departments, his unit set up income-generating businesses, and Kim became a vice president in the Sohae (West Sea) Asahi Trading Company, which operated three fishing vessels exporting flounder and sole to Japan. As a hard-currency earner for the regime, Kim had access to dollars, foreign goods and culture, and a chauffeur-driven car.

Unfortunately, Kim's true parentage was discovered, quite by accident, after someone else turned up bearing his assumed name. He was arrested and interrogated for three months at the Maram *bo-wi-bu* detention/interrogation facility in the Yongsong district of Pyongyang and at another *bo-wi-bu* jail, called Moonsu, also in Pyongyang. The torture at Moonsu was particularly severe. Accused of deliberately infiltrating the security service, Kim was forced to kneel for long periods with a wooden bar placed behind and between his knees and calves. He was suspended by his handcuffed wrists from his prison-cell bars, and he was submerged up to his waist for long periods in tanks filled with cold water.

From 1995 to 1996, Kim was imprisoned in *Kwan-li-so* No. 14 at Kaechon-kun, South Pyong-an Province, where he worked in a coal mine. In 1996 he was transferred, he believes through the intervention of his supervisor at the Asahi Trading Company, to the adjacent *Kwan-li-so* No. 18, located on the other side of the Taedong River in Deukchang-ri, Bukchang-kun, South Pyong-an, where he primarily repaired coal trolleys. There, to his surprise — as he did not know if or where she was imprisoned — he was reunited with his mother, with whom he was allowed to live.

After Kim's mother was crippled by camp guards for gathering edible weeds outside the village compound beyond the allotted time, she encouraged him to escape, even if it meant risking his life. And so he did, in September 1998, by hiding in a coal train bound for the Moonchan Refinery. He soon crossed the Tumen River into China and, in October 1999, came to South Korea via Mongolia.

Parts of Kim's story were told (in Korean) in the May 2000 issue of the monthly magazine *Chosun Wolgan*, or *Chosun Monthly*. Adaptations of that article were published in English in volumes 16 and 17 — the Summer and Autumn 2000 issues, respectively — of *Life and Human Rights in North Korea*. Kim's own prison memoir will be published in 2003. He is the only known escapee from the *kwan-li-so* to have escaped to and been given asylum by South Korea. He is the sole source of information about *Kwan-li-so* Nos. 14 and 18, but secrecy, of course, is part of the point of lifetime-sentence political prison-labor camps.

### **TESTIMONY: *Kwan-li-so* No. 14, Kaecheon-kun, South Pyong-an Province**

Operated by the bo-wi-bu (National Security Agency) police, *Kwan-li-so* No. 14's location is designated as Kaecheon-kun, South Pyong-an. According to Kim's description, the camp location is in a mountainous area. The main part of the camp is near Kaecheon-kun, so the camp is sometimes called "Kaecheon." It encompasses an area some 40–50 kilometers (25–31 miles) long and some 30 kilometers (19 miles) wide, and holds some 15,000 prisoners.

Enterprises included mining, farming, and livestock-raising. The latter was considered the occupation of choice, as the prisoners had the opportunity to steal animal food and even pick through animal droppings for undigested grains. (Daily meals, according to Kim, were limited to 20–30 kernels of corn and watery cabbage soup.) When he first arrived at *Kwan-li-so* No. 14 and was assigned to coal mining at *Mujin II Gang* — that is, No. 2 Cutting Face, or a mine entrance — Kim was shocked by the skinniness and discoloration of the prisoners, who looked to him like soot-covered stickmen.

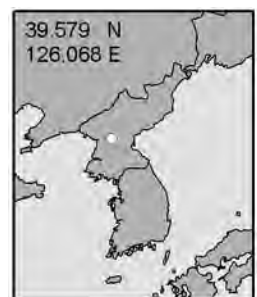
For two years, all Kim saw was the inside of his mine shafts, and the adjacent barracks, which contained six rooms with fifty persons per room sleeping on three tiers of wooden bunks. Fortunately, as this was a coal mine, the barracks were heated. Next to the barracks was an eating room/washroom, a sawmill, and a pumping station. The mining work was divided among tunneling/digging teams, loaders, tracklayers, railcar operators, and sawmill workers. The leader of Kim's tunneling team was a former major general, KIM Jae Keun, who had been purged and sent to *Kwan-li-so* No. 14 for having sided with Kim Il Sung's stepbrother Kim Pyong Il against the succession of Kim Jong Il.

Men and women were segregated from each other. In fact, the only time Kim saw women during his two years of imprisonment was when all the workers were taken outside the mine area for road construction.

There were no public executions during this time at *Kwan-li-so* No. 14, but many prisoners died of malnutrition and disease, some twenty-five were executed by guards, and even more died from mining accidents. In one execution, a KIM Chul Min was executed for collecting, without authorization, ripe chestnuts that had fallen to the ground from a tree at the mine entrance. Another hunger-crazed prisoner, KAL Li Yong, died after having his mouth smashed by a feces-covered stick for having stolen a leather whip, soaked it in water, and then ate the softened leather.

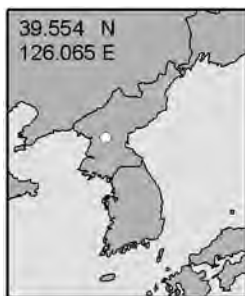
See pages 109 to 112 for satellite photographs of *Kwan-li-so* No. 14.

Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaecheon



## TESTIMONY: *Kwan-li-so* No. 18, Deukchang-ri, Bukchang-kun, South Pyong-an Province

Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang



Located on the other side of the Taedong River from *Kwan-li-so* No. 14, *Kwan-li-so* No. 18 is something of an anomaly among the *kwan-li-so* in that it is run by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police rather than the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police<sup>34</sup> and is a much less strict and severe prison-labor colony. But it holds some 50,000 prisoners: the families of the presumed wrongdoers imprisoned in *Kwan-li-so* No. 14. Roughly 30,000 are organized into work teams. The other 20,000 are children and elderly relatives.

Labor projects at *Kwan-li-so* No. 18 included coal-mining, brick-making, and cement-making, along with work in a glass factory and a distillery. Unusually, during Kim's imprisonment at this *kwan-li-so*, the prison laborers were paid a token amount of 30 *won* a month — barely the cost of a pack of cigarettes. Families were allowed to live together, and privileged prisoners were allowed to marry and have children. There were also radio broadcasts, and copies of *Rodong Shinmun*, the *Workers' Daily*, were posted at the entrances to worksites. Privileged prisoners were allowed outside the gates to collect herbs.

*Kwan-li-so* No. 18 also had a very small “revolutionizing zone,” for prisoners that were eligible for release back into society, and even a “liberation zone,” where a small number of prisoners were allowed to send and receive mail, go to the local market, and even receive a gift of liquor from the state on the occasion of Kim Il Sung's birthday, apparently in recognition of their ongoing citizenship.

Prisoners at *Kwan-li-so* No. 18 did, however, die of malnutrition, disease, and work accidents. And there were public executions — dozens of them, according to Kim. Rule-breakers were shot. Attempted escapees were hanged.

*See pages 102 to 109 for satellite photographs of Kwan-li-so No. 18.*

## WITNESS: Former Guard AHN Myong Chol, *Kwan-li-so* Nos. 11, 13, 26, and 22



Far Eastern Economic Review

Unlike the witnesses just described, who were released or escaped prisoners, AHN Myong Chol was a *kwan-li-so* guard. Ahn was born in 1969 in Hangwon, South Hamgyong Province. Ahn came from a good Korean Workers' Party family, so for his compulsory military service, he became a *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police guard assigned, consecutively, to four different *kwan-li-so*: No. 11, at Kyungsun, North Hamgyong Province, from May to August 1987; No. 13, at Jongsong, North Hamgyong Province, from August 1987 to the winter of 1990, except for four months during this time when he was sent to the much smaller prison No. 26 in Pyongyang; and No. 22 at Haengyong in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, from late 1990 to mid-1994. Of the four places, as of December 2002, only *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 is still open and operational.

<sup>34</sup> And thus might not be considered a *kwan-li-so* by some.

Ahn's father worked at a public distribution center. During the famine, he was caught giving food to one of his neighbors and became labeled as a "reactionary element." When Ahn learned of his father's situation, he fled with his wife across the Tumen River into China. After he reached Seoul, he was interviewed by the monthly magazine *Chosun Wolgan*, or *Chosun Monthly*. Portions of the resulting article were published in English in *Political Prison Camps in North Korea*, by the Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights, Seoul. Ahn's Korean-language memoirs, *They Are Crying for Help*, was published by Chungji Media, Seoul, but the book is out of print and the publisher is out of business. In 1998, Ahn testified before the U.S. Congress. In December 2002, he was able to identify the buildings and grounds on several satellite photographs of *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 for publication in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (December 12, 2002).

Ahn's guard duties included making deliveries by truck to various parts of *Kwan-li-so* No. 22. This assignment gave him unusual mobility within the camp, even for a guard. He learned much from his conversations with other guards while making deliveries to various sections of the camp. His work at four of the camps provided him with comparative insights into the functioning of the *kwan-li-so* system. Also of interest is his guard training and indoctrination.

Ahn reports that the prisoners were referred to as "emigrants." Great stress was placed on the harm and threat that "factionalists" posed to the revolution; how factionalism produces class enemies; how factionalists and class enemies have to be destroyed like weeds, down to their roots, through the *yeon-jwa-je* three-generation family-incarceration system; and how guards have to exercise their control duties so as to reveal to the class enemies the dictatorship of the proletariat. Like some of the former prisoners, Ahn recalls the shock he felt upon his first arrival at a camp, where he likened the prisoners to walking skeletons, dwarfs, and cripples in rags.

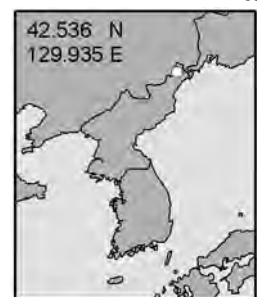
## **TESTIMONY: *Kwan-li-so* No. 22, Haengyong, Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province**

Also sometimes identified as Hoeryong, where the camp headquarters is located, the official designations for *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 are "Chosun People's Security Unit 2209" or "Pueksan-ku Ministry of State Security." No. 22 covers an area, according to Ahn, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) in length and 40 kilometers (25 miles) in width. There are roughly 1,000 guards and 500–600 administrative agents for 50,000 prisoners, the families of alleged wrongdoers.

Ahn reports that the annual agricultural production quotas for *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 were as follows: 400 tons of corn, 100,000 tons of potatoes, 50,000 tons of lima beans, and 10,000 tons of red peppers per year. The camp also grew Chinese cabbages, radishes, cucumbers, and eggplants, and had a distillery that produced soy sauce and whiskeys. No. 22 mined coal that was shipped to the Chongjin Thermal Power Plant and the Chongjin and Kimchaek Steel Mills.

Notwithstanding the agricultural production, Ahn estimates that 1,500 to 2,000 prisoners at *Kwan-li-so* No. 22, mostly children, died from malnutrition yearly. Executions were not public at the colony but were carried out at a site named "Sugol." He estimates that there were ten executions per year, mostly in October, of people who had

Kwan-li-so No. 22 Haengyong





been caught eating from harvest foods. People were fed corn and potatoes, almost no vegetables, and no meat. The only meat in their diets came from the rats, snakes, and frogs they could catch. There were also deaths from beatings of prisoners who had not been meeting their production quotas. In fact, Ahn says, there were so many deaths from beatings that at one point the guards were warned to be less violent.

Only a few privileged prisoners were allowed to marry. Otherwise, sex was prohibited. Ahn is aware of one pregnant woman who was executed as a punishment for her pregnancy. *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 had a notorious detention barracks for prisoners who disobeyed camp regulations. Ahn was a guard nearby and heard the screams of the prisoners as they were beaten.

The prisoners at *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 were paid approximately 500 *won* per year. Youth at the colony received basic schooling in elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic. The camp also had nine holidays per year.

*See pages 113 to 117 for satellite photographs of Kwan-li-so No. 22.*

## Closed *Kwan-li-so*

### WITNESS: Former Guard **CHOI Dong Chul**



CHOI Dong Chul is the son of LEE Soon Ok, whose story appears below. At the time of his mother's arrest, Choi was a student at Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang. Prior to his mother's arrest, when the family was still in very high standing within the Korean Workers' Party, Choi fulfilled a portion of his compulsory military service, from February 1985 to June 1986, as a guard at *Kwan-li-so* No. 11 for families of political wrongdoers, located in Kyongsung, North Hamgyong Province. This is the same 15,000–20,000-inmate encampment where Ahn Myong Chol was a guard in 1987. Though *Kwan-li-so* No.11 was closed in 1989 and its inmates transferred to other political penal-labor colonies, Choi's testimony, along with that of Ahn, provides an additional glimpse into the operation of North Korea's *kwan-li-so*.

Both Ahn Myong Chol and Choi Dong Chul were guards at *Kwan-li-so* No. 11 at Kyongsong, North Hamgyong Province, from May to August 1987 and from February 1985 to June 1986, respectively. In this camp, some 20,000 family prisoners engaged in potato farming and logging. According to the KINU *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, *Kwan-li-so* No. 11 was closed in 1989.

Ahn Myong Chol was also a guard at *Kwan-li-so* No. 13 at Jongsong, North Hamgyong Province, from 1987 to 1990. No. 13 held some 30,000 prisoners, he estimates. According to the KINU *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea*, *Kwan-li-so* No. 13 was closed at the end of 1990 because it was too close to the Chinese border, tempting prisoners to try to escape.

For one four-month period while he was a guard at *Kwan-li-so* No. 13, Ahn was briefly transferred to guard the much smaller political prison No. 26 at Hwachon-dong,

Sungho-ri district, Pyongyang. The KINU *White Paper on Human Rights* notes that No. 26 closed in January 1991.

The KINU White Paper also notes that *Kwan-li-so* No. 12 at Changpyong, Onsong, North Hamgyong Province, was closed in 1989, also because of its proximity to the border with China. Further, *Kwan-li-so* No. 27 at Chonma, North Pyong-an Province, was closed in 1990 for unknown reasons.

One of the anonymous former prisoners from one of the *kyo-hwa-so* prisons discussed in the next section of part one of this report was transferred to a *kwan-li-so* at Danchun, South Hamgyong Province in the mid-1980s. He reports that this camp closed in the late 1980s.

### Other *Kwan-li-so*

The KINU White Paper includes *Kwan-li-so* No. 16 at Hwasong, North Hamgyong Province, for the families of condemned, and *Kwan-li-so* No. 25 at Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province, for the condemned.

Professor HEO Man Ho of Kyungpook National University, Daegu, also reports a *Kwan-li-so* No. 16 at Cochang-ri, Hwasong-kun (located in North Hamgyong Province,) containing about 10,000 “anti-revolutionary and anti-Party elements” held on charges of opposing the succession to Kim Jong Il, and adds that former Vice-Chairman of State KIM Dong Gyu is imprisoned there. Heo further notes a Suseong Edification Center in Sunam district, Chongjin City, run by the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police; he reports that the center holds about 3,000 detainees and their families, including pastors and presbyters from South Hwanghae Province, and a Mr. HOE Taek, a Korean repatriate from Japan.<sup>35</sup> However, no former prisoners or guards were accessible to provide first-person or eyewitness confirmation during the preparation of this report.<sup>36</sup>

## THE NORTH KOREAN GULAG II: *KYO-HWA-SO* LONG-TERM PRISON-LABOR FACILITIES

### Introduction: Deaths in Detention

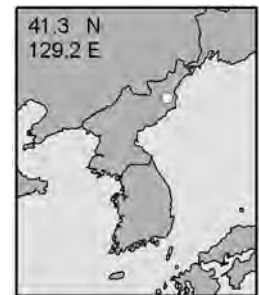
The Korean word transliterated phonetically as *kyo-hwa-so* translates as “a place to make a good person through re-education.” More commonly, *kyo-hwa-so* is translated as an “enlightenment,” “re-education,” or “re-socialization” center. Some of the former prisoners interviewed for this report used the term “*ro-dong* (labor) *kyo-hwa-so*,” meaning “re-education through labor.”

In theory, “re-education through labor” might be a more rehabilitative way to treat criminal offenders when compared with simply warehousing convicts to keep them off public streets for long periods. However, this theory bears no relation to the *kyo-hwa-so* described by the former North Korean prisoners interviewed for this report. According

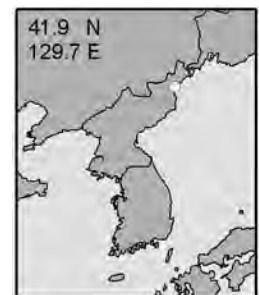
<sup>35</sup> Paper on “Political Detention Camps in Relation to Socio-Political Change in North Korea” (p. 40) presented at the 4th International Conference on North Korean Human Rights and Refugees, 2003, Prague, Czech Republic.

<sup>36</sup> Note: The KINU White Paper focuses on camps run by the 7th Bureau of the *bo-wi-bu* police and therefore does not count No. 18 as a *kwan-li-so* “management center,” as it is not run by the *bo-wi-bu*.

Kwan-li-so No. 16 Kaechon



Kwan-li-so No. 25 Chongjin



to these witnesses, the “educational” component at these facilities consisted mostly of forced memorizing of the speeches of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and organized “self-criticism” sessions. These sessions were often conducted in the evenings, and the exhausted prisoners were not allowed to return to their cells to sleep until they could recite the speeches. Prisoners, kneeling in front of their work-units and facing the prison officials, would frequently falsely confess to imaginary mistakes, which the prison officials or prison-group leaders could then “criticize,” so that the work unit could conclude the criticism sessions and go back to their overcrowded cells.

*Kyo-hwa-so* are run by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency), formerly called the *Sa-hyo-an-jeon-bu* (Social Safety Agency). Some of the *kyo-hwa-so* resemble large penitentiaries: a single large compound surrounded by high walls and barbed- or electrified-wire fencing and containing several buildings for manufacturing production, prisoner housing, and offices for guards and prison officials. Other *kyo-hwa-so* are large barbed-wire-enclosed encampments, located in the valleys of high mountains, composed of prisoner villages where prisoners engage in mining or lumber-cutting activities.

In many aspects of day-to-day prison life, the *kyo-hwa-so* resemble the *kwan-li-so* described in the previous section of this report. The prisons are harsh “strict-regime” places (virtually no prisoner privileges) where prisoners are forced to do hard, often heavy, and often dangerous labor while being provided food rations insufficient to sustain even sedentary life (and where the provision of literally sub-subsistence food rations preceded the mid-1990s famine in North Korea). The combination of hard labor and below-subsistence-level food provisions results in rapid weight loss, industrial or mining work accidents, malnutrition-related diseases, and death. The largely doctor-less and medicine-less prison “hospitals” or “clinics” are essentially places where the sick and injured who can no longer work are sent to await death. Loss of life occurs at such high rates that many of the *kyo-hwa-so* are perceived by prisoners as death camps in that they expect to die before the completion of their sentences.

The primary — and substantial — difference between *kyo-hwa-so* prisoners and *kwan-li-so* prisoners is that the former are almost always subjected to a judicial process and, upon conviction, are given a sentence of set length, while the latter, along with their families, are simply purged and put away for life. In an important respect, *kyo-hwa-so* prisons and prison camps are, by design, correctional facilities for persons convicted of “heavy crimes,” the equivalent of what would be in the United States felony offenses. Indeed, some of the former prisoners interviewed for this report admitted that they had committed crimes for which they would be punished in a normal society.

But others sentenced to these prison-labor camps are convicted of offenses that would not normally be criminalized: private economic transactions not undertaken within an officially appointed work station, or offenses that are, in essence, political crimes. Some interviewed for this report were driven to engage in private economic transactions, including activities such as smuggling (trading goods across the North Korea–China border), because of the breakdown in the state-run production and distribution systems. Others were arrested and convicted due to power struggles between the North Korean Communist Party functionaries that staff the production/distribution facilities and police units that were dissatisfied with their share of goods and/or bribes in a collapsing social setting that is endemically corrupt.

Further, it should be noted that while a state has the right to deprive persons who commit crimes of their liberty, it does not have the right to deprive prisoners of food or medical treatment. Indeed, states have a responsibility to feed those who, upon trial and conviction, have been deprived of their liberty and temporarily removed from civil society. And this does not mean the state can squeeze work out of prisoners without feeding them, only to release them to return home to die from their prison-acquired illnesses and diseases. Duly convicted criminals lose their right to liberty but not their right to life.

## WITNESSES AND TESTIMONY

### WITNESS: LEE Soon Ok, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1



LEE Soon Ok was born in 1947 into a privileged and stalwart Korean Workers' Party family. Her grandfather had fought in Kim Il Sung's Manchurian army against the Japanese occupation of Korea. Her son was enrolled in Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, open only to children of the elite. Trained as an accountant, Lee rose to become a supervisor in the No. 65 Distribution Center in Onsong, North Hamgyong Province, which distributed Chinese-manufactured fabrics to party and state officials. She was arrested in 1986 in what she believes was a power struggle between the Workers' Party, whose members run the nationwide distribution system, and the public security bureau police, who were not satisfied with the amount of goods being provided to them by the distribution centers. She was charged with theft and bribery and held for seven months in the Onsong *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) *ka-mok* (jail), where she was tortured severely because she refused to confess to the allegations against her. Then, upon her expulsion from the Party, she was transferred to an *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) provincial interrogation center, where she was held for another seven months and further tortured.

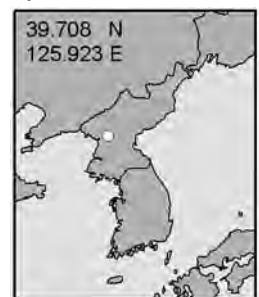
To escape even further torture and threats against her family members, Lee ultimately agreed to sign a confession. Afterwards, she was given a public trial and sentenced to fourteen years at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1, located at Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province, where, among other things, the prisoners manufacture garments. Though she originally worked in the ordinary sewing lines, she was eventually transferred because of her accounting and managerial experience to the administrative office of the prison, where she had the opportunity to observe and learn a great deal more about how the prison-labor camp was run.

After her release, in February 1994, Lee and her son fled from North Korea to China, eventually arriving in South Korea in December 1995 via Hong Kong. Once in South Korea, she wrote a prison memoir, *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman*,<sup>37</sup> which names numerous persons who died under torture in the jails of Onsong and from various mistreatments at Kaechon prison labor camp.

Lee's testimony for this report was drawn from her published prison memoir as well as from a personal interview.

<sup>37</sup> Published in Korean by Chunji Media, Seoul, in 1996, and in English by Living Sacrifice Book Company, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in 1999.

Kyo-hwa-so No. 1 Kaechon



## TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1, Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province

Located in the corner of a valley surrounded by mountains in Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 is a prison complex holding, at the time of Lee's imprisonment, some 6,000 prisoners. A high wall with an electrified-wire fence surrounds the complex, which includes prisoner dormitories, a large two-story factory, and office buildings for guards and prison officials.<sup>38</sup>

The other prisoners at the time of Lee's imprisonment included actual criminals, citizens convicted of not obeying government rules, and Lee reports, some 250 Korean women who had voluntarily repatriated from Japan in November of 1987. Some women, reportedly, were housewives convicted of stealing food for their families as the North Korean production and distribution system started its decline.

Prisoners were supposed to get rations of some 700 grams (25 ounces) per day consisting of corn, rice, and beans. Instead, the guards ate the rice and beans, leaving each prisoner with only some 100 grams (3.5 ounces) of corn per meal, or a meager 300 grams (11 ounces) per day. Constant and severe hunger was the norm, and the dehumanizing environment led the prisoners to fight each other for scraps of food.

The primary prison-labor occupations at *Kyo-hwa-so* No.1 during Lee's imprisonment were garment and shoe manufacturing. Shoemaking was considered by the prisoners to be the worse of the two occupations because of the hard labor involved in cutting and sewing leather and because of the toxic glue used in the shoes. The garment factory initially made army uniforms but later produced bras for export to the Soviet Union, doilies for export to Poland, hand-knit sweaters for export to Japan, and paper flowers for export to France.

The women's garment factories were organized into various departments: fabric cutting, sewing lines, machinery maintenance, and facility services, for example. Most departments had some 250 to 300 members, and each department had a supervisor, record-keeper, and messenger. The departments were organized into units of fifty to sixty prisoners, and each unit divided into work teams of five to seven prisoners, with one prisoner assigned to be the work-team leader. Each work team did everything as a group: eating, sleeping, even toilet breaks. Newcomers had difficulty adjusting to the group toilet-break regimen. Initially unable to contain themselves, these prisoners would have to remain sitting at their sewing line work-stations in their soiled clothing.

The whole group would be punished for the infraction of one of its members, a common infraction being the failure to meet individual — or group — production quotas. The most common and immediate punishment was reduced food rations. Frequently the threat of reduced food rations drove the women prisoners to work through constant pain. In winter, hands and fingers numb from cold were prone to accidents from the sewing needles and scissors. Mindful of their production quotas, prisoners continued at their work-stations, doubly fearful that their dripping blood would soil the garments

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<sup>38</sup> Lee Soon Ok was imprisoned at the same place as Ji Hae Nam, whose testimony follows Lee's in this report, and only several months apart. The two women were interviewed separately and did not know each other. Lee's figures for the prison population at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 include both male prisoners from a nearby prison and women prisoners.

they were sewing. Repeated infractions led to transfer to the prison's shoe factory. Even more severe punishment included prolonged solitary confinement in a cell too small to allow for a person to fully stand up or lie down inside, leading to loss of circulation and severe pain.

In the prison dormitories, eighty to ninety prisoners slept head-to-toe in cells roughly sixteen by twenty feet square. In winter, sleeping side by side kept the prisoners warm, but in summer, the dorms were dreadfully hot and foul smelling. The prisoners preferred to sleep, if they could, under their sewing machines in the factory, on floors dusty with cotton fiber.

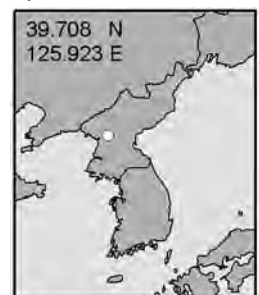
The bodies of prisoners who died in detention were simply dumped in the mountains like dead animals, non-burial being culturally offensive to Koreans. Prisoners were also offended by being cursed or kicked by persons younger than themselves, another cultural offense. Missing stitches, or soiling or spoiling garments, in the sewing factory commonly resulted in kicks or slaps. Several years of below-subsistence-level food rations coupled with hard labor and brutal treatment apparently caused spinal columns and ligaments to weaken. Numerous physical deformities followed, and many women prisoners developed “hunched backs.”

In addition to deaths from malnutrition-related diseases and the tiny “punishment cells,” there were public executions in front of the assembled prison population — usually of men who had broken under pressure and cursed or defied the guards, but also of women who had been overheard expressing complaints. The other prisoners were required to file by the executed corpses, a practice that caused some prisoners to lose composure, scream, and act out. Many of these prisoners were then punished with solitary confinement. The solitary-confinement cells would be filled following the public executions.

Predictably, the prison conditions and labor system resulted in high rates of industrial work accidents and epidemics of paratyphoid (dehydration resulting from severe and prolonged diarrhea). The small number of women who came into the prison pregnant were forced to have injection-induced abortions.

*Kyo-hwa-so* No.1 also featured weekly self-criticism and propaganda — literally, “re-civilization” — sessions. Prisoners were required to memorize and recite Kim Il Sung's New Year's Day speech for that year. Those who could not do the memorization were punished. One man who refused to memorize and recite the speech was publicly executed. These “re-civilization training programs” included listening to radio broadcasts in which North Korea criticized the political imprisonment of student radicals and labor protesters in South Korea. These broadcasts struck the prisoners as odd, as the offenses for which the South Korean protesters were being jailed were capital offenses in North Korea.

Kyo-hwa-so No. 1 Kaecheon



## WITNESS: JI Hae Nam, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1



Ji Hae Nam was born in 1949 in Namun-ri, Hamhung City, South Hamgyong Province. At one point, she worked as a Korean Workers' Party propaganda cadre, visiting factories to explain party policy and exhort factory workers, sometimes through patriotic work songs, to meet their production quotas. But after the 13th Party Congress in 1989, her faith in the Party began to waver. A decade of hardship began shortly thereafter.

At the time, a North Korean TV show mocking former South Korean President PARK Chun Hee featured one of Park's concubines singing an apparently popular South Korean pop song, "Don't Cry for Me, Hongdo" (or, Younger Sister). Ji was taken with the song and its melody and memorized it. On a lunar calendar holiday coinciding with Christmas day, December 25, 1992, Ji and four other women had an evening song party in Hamjun-kun, South Hamgyong Province, at which Ji taught the song to the other women. Overheard by neighbors, reported to the authorities, and arrested for singing a South Korean song, Ji was taken first to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) jail in Hamjun-kun for fifteen days, and then to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* police jail in Myungchun-kun in North Hamgyong Province. During her pre-trial detention, she was beaten and sexually abused by a detention-facility guard. Mortified at her mistreatment by the young guard, who has in his early twenties, Ji tried to commit suicide by swallowing pieces of cement.

The other four women at the song party were sentenced to eight months of forced labor. During the investigation of Ji's role as the song leader, the charge of stealing food rations, technically falsifying documents to get more food rations than she should have, was added to the charge of disrupting the socialist order — "Article fifty-something," she recalls. She was sentenced to three years of rehabilitation-through-labor at the woman's prison *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 at Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province.

After serving two years and two months of her three-year sentence, in September 1995, Ji, along with fifty other "light crime" prisoners, was released on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation. She returned to Hamjun-kun but, as an ex-convict, felt that doors were closed to her. As the economy deteriorated, she was unable to make ends meet as a peddler and resorted to selling her blood at transfusion centers. Hungry and disillusioned about her future prospects, she fled to China in September 1998, but she was almost immediately caught by a trafficker and sold to a physically deformed Chinese man who locked her up as a "sex toy" for seven months before she was able to escape. She then made her way to Weihai, where she worked in a restaurant and saved what little money she could. She eventually teamed up with six other North Koreans in China and stole a boat to try to get to South Korea by sea, but the engine broke down. The boat filled with water on rough seas and had to be towed back to shore by Chinese fishermen. Shortly thereafter, Ji and her fellow Korean escapees stole another boat and again set out to sea, but this boat was intercepted by the authorities and the amateur sailors turned over to Chinese border guards.

Taken to the Tandong detention center in China, Ji was forcibly repatriated to North Korea and sent to the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police *ka-mok* (jail) in

Sinuiju, where there were twenty-five women and thirty men — all *tal-bukza* (“escaped North persons”). While in this *bo-wi-bu* jail, she was beaten with broom sticks, forced to kneel for hours at a time, and made to do the “stand-up-sit-down” exercise to the point of collapse, usually after thirty to forty minutes. Some of the younger women were kept in solitary confinement and sexually abused, Ji reports. After a month, she was sent to the Sinuiju *jip-kyul-so* (detention center), but a week later, on December 25, 1999, she was released as part of a larger pardon for persons repatriated from China.

Fearing she would be constantly watched and possibly re-arrested, Ji made her way to Musan, and in January 2000, crossed the frozen Tumen River back into China. This time her luck had turned. She found work in a company managed by a South Korean. Then she met a South Korean pastor who assisted a group of North Korean refugees, including Ji, in making their way to South Korea. The group went from Weihai to Beijing to Kunming in southern China. Caught by the Chinese police near the Vietnam border, they successfully passed themselves off as Korean-Chinese and walked overnight over a mountain path into Vietnam. By train, by motorbike, and on foot they made their way down through Southeast Asia and on to Seoul, where they obtained asylum.

During her interview for this report, which lasted all afternoon in a human rights NGO office in Seoul, Ji spoke in rapid anger as she described the conditions of *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 at Kaechon. She laughed as she recounted her misadventures on the high seas in stolen, leaky boats that had almost no chance of actually crossing the West Sea (also called the Yellow Sea) to South Korea. And she fought back tears as she referred to the sexual harassments and violations she endured in custody and as a trafficked person. For the last question of the interview, the researcher asked Ji if she ever again sang the song, “Don’t Cry for Me, Hongdo.” Straightaway she replied, “Yes, and now without fear.”

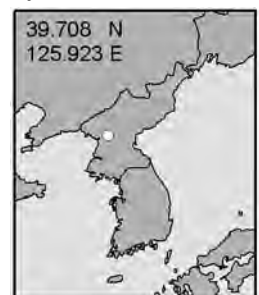
### **TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1, Kaechon, South Pyong-an Province**

Surrounded by a 4-meter (13-foot) wall topped with barbed wire, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 held roughly 1,000 women prisoners who made clothing and leather goods during Ji’s imprisonment. (Shortly before her arrival, hundreds of women had been transferred to another prison, she was told by other inmates.) The prisoners were divided into nine work divisions and smaller work units. Two work divisions made shoes and leather bags. Men from another prison were brought in to prepare the leather. As the leather-work was the worst work, it was the repeat offenders and prison rule-breakers — some seventy to eighty women — who were assigned to the leather divisions. Ji’s offense was essentially political, but many other prisoners had been convicted of theft, fraud, murder, adultery, and prostitution.

While most women worked in sewing lines, other work units were organized for cooking, construction, cleaning, maintenance, farming outside the prison compound, and a mobile “day-labor unit.” Each work unit was given a production quota that required hard, fast work. Talking was not allowed on the sewing lines, and “on a daily basis,” the women guards or wardens would kick or beat women prisoners who worked too slowly, in front of the other prisoners. Minor rule-breakers were given less desirable jobs or reduced rations. Worse offenders were placed in tiny punishment cells where they were unable to lie down or stand up.

Working hours were from eight in the morning until six in the evening, followed by

Kyo-hwa-so No. 1 Kaechon





hour-and-a-half unit-wide self-criticism sessions, both *saeng-hwal-chong-hwa* (daily-life criticism) and *saen-gho-bi-pan* (mutual criticism). There were incentives and rewards for the prisoners to spy and tattle on each other, and so the prisoners did. According to Ji, the theory of the prison was that with their strength and spirit broken by hard labor, the prisoners would repent through self-criticism and change their mentality.

The most salient characteristic of this prison was the inadequate food rations. Each day, prisoners were given a palm-sized ball of cornmeal and some cabbage-leaf soup. According to Ji, seventy percent of the prisoners suffered from malnutrition, and during her two years of imprisonment, a fifth of the prisoners — namely those without nearby families to bring them extra food — died of starvation and malnutrition-related disease.

### **WITNESS: Former Prisoner #6, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77**



Former Prisoner #6 was born in 1960 in South Pyong-an Province. While in the North Korean military, he was a small operative in a scheme of his military unit that diverted to personal gain the profit from goods that had been imported to North Korea from Japan and then re-exported to China. Dismissed from the army after almost a year of military detention, he was convicted by a civilian “People’s Judiciary” in Dukchun and sentenced for two years to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 near Danchun, South Hamgyong Province, a gold-mining labor camp where some 2,000 out of roughly 7,000 to 8,000 prisoners died of mining accidents, malnutrition, and malnutrition-related diseases during the two years Former Prisoner #6 was imprisoned there, in the late 1980s.

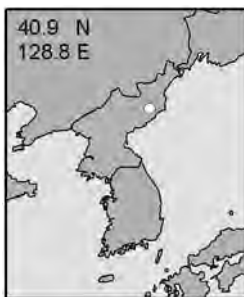
Former Prisoner #6 mined gold for three months and then spent six months in the prison “health clinic” before serving the remainder of his sentence working in the prison cafeteria. He was released in 1987. He later fled to China, where he lived for several years before arriving in South Korea in 2001.

### **TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77, Danchun, South Hamgyong Province**

According to Former Prisoner #6, there was a large prison-labor *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 55 at Chunma, South Hamgyong Province, but that camp was overcrowded, so a number of prisoners there were transferred to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77, a *kyung jaebun* (criminal re-education prison-labor camp) located in the mountains between Daeheung and Geomtuk in North Hamgyong Province. During the time when Former Prisoner #6 was imprisoned, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 held some 7,000 to 8,000 prisoners, all male, most of whom were serving three-year sentences.

The *kyo-hwa-so* was divided into units of 800 to 1,000 prisoners, and these units were divided into sub-units of 60 to 100 prisoners. In the unit of Former Prisoner #6, some 15 to 20 prisoners were persons imprisoned for going to China, but most were prisoners convicted of what would be criminal offenses in any country. About half of the prisoners who came into this unit were already malnourished and ill from below-subsistence-level food rations while under pre-trial and pre-sentence detention. At *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 the prisoners were fed daily only a small coffee-cup-sized ball of mixed corn, rice, and beans along with a watery salted-cabbage soup. (These below-subsistence-level food rations preceded the mid-1990s famine in North Korea.) The prisoners slept in wooden dormitories holding between 60 and 70 persons.

Kyo-hwa-so No. 77 Danchun



Most prisoners at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 mined gold. Some of the mine-shafts dated back to the early days of the Japanese occupation of Korea in the early 1900s. Accessing the veins of mineable gold required descending and, later, ascending a wooden staircase 500 meters (1,640 feet) in length, using gas lanterns for light. Deaths from mining accidents were a daily occurrence, including multiple deaths resulting from the partial collapse of mineshafts.

Huge numbers of prisoners were so severely malnourished that after a short period of hard labor, they could no longer work in the mines and were sent to the clinic or “hospital” section of the prison camp. At times, this section would hold up to 1,000 prisoners. Some prisoners intentionally injured themselves to get out of the mines. Prisoners stayed at the clinic from one to six months, but the clinic was mostly a place to await death. During the detention of Former Prisoner #6, nearly a third of the prisoners died within their first month at the clinic. Sometimes, if a prisoner was near death, he would be released to die at home, in an effort to reduce the extremely high number of deaths under detention. Thirty to fifty new prisoners were brought in every week to keep the mine going.

The prisoners themselves considered *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 to be a death camp, in that they did not expect to live until the completion of their (typically) three-year sentences. Nonetheless, the sub-units had a lecture and self-criticism session once a week, on Saturday or Sunday before the evening meal, when prisoners would confess their wrongdoings and shortcomings. During these sessions, the entire sub-unit would stand except for the confessing prisoner, who would kneel in front of the group, facing the guards. Once every month there was a unit-wide criticism session to discuss production shortcomings.

There were public executions in front of the entire camp of persons caught trying to escape, steal from the prison warehouse, or inflict injuries on themselves. During public executions, the guards were very heavily armed.

## WITNESS: YOU Chun Sik, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22

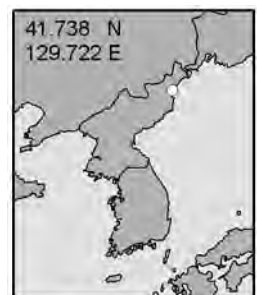


YOU Chun Sik was born in November 1963 in Onsong, North Hamgyong Province. Following completion of his military service, in which he held the rank of platoon commander, he worked for a construction company in Onsong. His long string of encounters with the North Korean prison and detention system began in 1996.

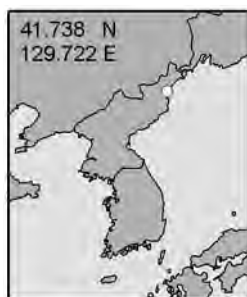
After food distribution ceased at his place of employment, You went to Kangwan Province to buy fish to sell to Koreans in China. He made “good money” and also began buying personal effects and selling them in China. Caught by the North Korean police, he was sentenced in January 1996 to six months’ hard labor at the Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training camp) for not working at his designated workplace, for unauthorized buying and selling, and for an old assault they dredged up from his military record. (You thinks he actually would have been given a longer sentence if not for his military-service record.)

In May 1995, with one month left to go in his six-month sentence, You was given a temporary holiday release. But he became inebriated during holiday festivities and was

Kyo-hwa-so No. 22 Oro



Kyo-hwa-so No. 22 Oro



late returning to the labor-training camp. For this infraction, he was hung upside-down for three hours, and all of the other one-hundred-odd prisoners at the labor-training camp had to march past and hit him while he was hanging. Following his collective beating, You was taken to an *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) *ku-ryu-jang* (detention center) and then sent in a group of nine prisoners to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 (called "two-two" by the prisoners) in Oro-kun, South Hamgyong Province, for a one-year prison term. All eight of the other prisoners in his entering group died of malnutrition and beatings from guards and other prisoners during You's year-long sentence.

Released from *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 in September 1997, You fled to China that October. He worked in Shenyang for a South Korean company until February 2000, when he was caught by Chinese police and held in Shenyang for six weeks and then in a detention center in the town of Dandong, near the North Korean border, for another month. The Dandong police turned him over to the Sinuiju *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police, who held him in a *ka-mok* (jail) for six weeks of interrogation. You was accused of working for a South Korean company; fearing execution, he initially denied the accusation.

While in the Sinuiju *ka-mok*, You was kicked, beaten, and, along with five or six other prisoners in his cell, made to sit motionless under a surveillance camera for the whole day, except during meals. If the prisoners moved, they were beaten on the fingers. If observed talking, they were forced to slap each other. Only a few of the guards allowed the prisoners to stretch. You described the sitting-motionless torture as being more painful than the beatings.

You reports that the majority of the Sinuiju *bo-wi-bu ka-mok* detainees were women, most of whom were later sent to detention facilities in their hometowns. While You was detained in Sinuiju in mid-2000, seven newly repatriated women were brought in, four of whom were pregnant and shortly after taken away. He later met one woman from this group in China; she told him that the four who had been taken away were given forced abortions.

You finally admitted to his jailers that he had worked in China for a South Korean-owned company. He also convinced them all that the other employees were Chinese or Korean-Chinese, which seemed to matter to his jailers. He was taken to Pyongyang *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) center for additional interrogations, where, he reports, other imprisoned persons were high-ranking officials and where there was no torture. After enduring two weeks of interrogation in Pyongyang, he was sent to a National Security Agency detention facility in his hometown of Onsong for the month of August. He was then transferred to the Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police jail for twenty days before being sent in October to the *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training camp) No. 55 in Youngkwang-kun, South Hamgyong Province, for a one-year sentence of hard labor.

You became so ill that in January 2001 he was released on temporary home sick-leave. Upon recovery, he was supposed to return to the labor-training camp to complete his term, but he crossed the Tumen River and fled to China instead. You recovered in Shenyang for two months and then made his way to Mongolia. He was caught by the Mongolian border police and held for three days without food, but was then released.

He went to Ulan Bator, and with the help of South Koreans at the consulate there, was able to board a plane to Seoul on May 20, 2001.

### **TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22, Oro-kun, South Hamgyong Province**

Work in 1996 at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22, consisted mostly of carrying rocks to a nearby river and constructing stone embankments that would allow a hydro-electric station to generate electricity. Eight hundred to 1,000 men and up to 100 women labored there while serving unusually short (for *kyo-hwa-so* prisoners) sentences of one to two years.

As at other *kyo-hwa-so*, there was, You reports, a very high turnover rate at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22, owing to the high rate of deaths in detention. You entered prison in a group of nine prisoners. Within the year, he was the only one of the nine who had not died from malnutrition, forced labor, and beatings by guards and other prisoners. (The prisoners were organized to beat each other, most commonly by prison work-group or sub-group leaders, who would beat other prisoners if they worked too slowly or walked too slowly to or from their worksites.)

Prisoners were provided several spoonfuls a day of powdered corn mixed with wheat along with salted cabbage-leaf soup. Those who died of malnutrition were, mostly, prisoners whose families did not visit them to bring extra food. Of twenty persons in Cell No. 7 at the *kyo-hwa-so*, four died of malnutrition within a year. Other overcrowded cells held up to sixty or seventy prisoners, often with two persons sharing one blanket. The cells were categorized by offense or the number of convictions. Prisoners at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 had been sentenced for theft, assault, fraud, gambling, or opium addiction. There were no public executions at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22 during You's year there, although there were suicides and attempted suicides by prisoners seeking to end their suffering.

### **WITNESS: Former Prisoner #3, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3**

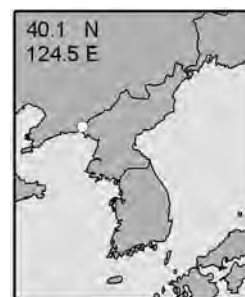


Former Prisoner #3 was arrested as a young man for assault and battery. After what he described as a fair trial, he was convicted for a crime he admits he committed and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He served from the early/middle 1980s to the early/middle 1990s at three separate prison facilities, including *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 8 at Yongdam, Kanwon Province; and *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3 in Sinuiju, North Pyong-an Province.

At Yongdam *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 8, some 3,000 prisoners manufactured bicycles, but most of the prisoners were transferred to a *kwan-li-so* in Danchun, South Hamgyong Province to mine and kiln-fire stones to be used in steel-making furnaces. At Danchun, prisoners died daily from the fumes emanating from the kilns and heated stones. After two years, when additional stockpiles of stones were no longer needed, many prisoners, including Former Prisoner #3, were transferred to a prison-labor camp in Sinuiju, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3, where the prisoners made clothes.

After his release from the Sinuiju *kyo-hwa-so* in the early/middle 1990s, Former Prisoner #3 carefully planned an escape from North Korea. He fled to China in 1998, slowly made his way down through Southeast Asia, and arrived in South Korea in August 2000.

Kyo-hwa-so No. 3 Sinuiju



### TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3, Sinuiju, North Pyong-an Province

As of the early 1990s, some 2,500 male prisoners were being held in *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 3 in Sinuiju, North Pyong-an Province, a city on the North Korean border with China recently in the news as the cite of a future “free-enterprise zone.” The inmates made prison uniforms and mined stones and gold. Some of the inmates were arrested for border crimes — visiting and/or smuggling goods to China. However, most were ordinary convicted criminals. Rations were meager: only some 450 grams (16 ounces) per day of rice mixed with beans. Many prisoners died in the winter from malnutrition, scabies and other skin diseases, and paratyphoid. Prisoners were beaten by guards. Other infractions and mistakes resulted in longer prison sentences. Those who attempted and failed to escape, or who initially succeeded in escaping but were caught, were brought back for public execution, after which their corpses would be displayed for a day.

### WITNESS: Former Prisoner #12, *Kyo-hwa-so* Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province



Former Prisoner #12, a forty-three-year-old native of Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province, was a truck driver when he was involved in a fistfight in 1991. A day after the altercation, the other person involved died from injuries sustained during the fight. As a result, Former Prisoner #12 was tried, convicted, and sentenced to six to ten years imprisonment in a *ro-dong-kyo-hwa-so* (labor prison camp) located in a mountainous area roughly 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Hoeryong (sometimes also transliterated as Hwe Ryung) in North Hamgyong Province. Prisoners at the labor-training camp mined copper, logged, manufactured furniture, and did farming work. Because of his previous occupation, Former Prisoner #12 was made a truck driver and repairman, a prison job that provided much greater mobility within the prison camp than that afforded to most other prisoners.

Former Prisoner #12 did not protest his trial or conviction. While he had not intended to fatally injure the man he had fought, he admitted he had committed a crime for which he should be punished. He was imprisoned for four years, from 1991 to 1995. According to his testimony, so many prisoners died of malnutrition and related diseases in 1993 that prison officials allowed gravely ill prisoners home-leave in 1994 and 1995, to cut down on the number of deaths in detention. Former Prisoner #12's weight declined from 80 kilograms (176 pounds) in 1991 to 35 kilograms (77 pounds) in 1995, though he admits that, knowing of the sickness-release policy, he did not engage in the frantic search for anything edible that characterized most prisoners' camp experiences.

After returning to his home for two months to regain his strength, he fled to China where he lived among Korean-Chinese in Harbin for five years before going to South Korea by a dangerous ship route in 2000.

### TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province

Hoeryong *kyo-hwa-so* is located in a mountainous area of North Hamgyong Province associated with the town of Hoeryong, even though it is some 40 kilometers (25 miles) away. Former Prisoner #12 used the term *ro-dong-kyo-hwa-so* when describing the camp, because the roughly 1,500 prisoners there were required to do hard labor: primarily copper-mining, but also logging and furniture-making. Convicts reportedly labored from five in the morning until five in the evening, mining not all that much copper but

Kyo-hwa-so No. 22  
Hoeryong



suffering many accidents to get it. Every day after work there was a self-criticism session, which Former Prisoner #12 described as extremely petty, and at which time prisoners always had to find some mistake to confess.

Most prisoners at the camp were convicted criminals sentenced to anywhere from one to fifteen years, although in 1992, some “political prisoners” arrived. Some sixty prisoners shared a sleeping dormitory. The prison camp also had 1.5-meter by 1.5-meter (5-foot by 5-foot) “punishment cells,” where scantily clad prisoners were placed on one-quarter food rations for one week at a time. Confinement in the tiny punishment cells was an excruciatingly painful form of torture.

Prisoners were also organized and compelled to beat other prisoners who committed various infractions. The highlight of prison-camp life was the rare occasion when prisoners would be taken outside the prison walls for exercise walks, at which time they were able to eat plants and grass. The most salient feature of Hoeryong *kyo-hwa-so* was its death rate. Below-subsistence-level food rations coupled with harsh conditions and hard labor resulted between 1991 and 1995 in the deaths of one-quarter to one-third of the inmates. So many prisoners died in 1993 that near-dead prisoners were allowed home-leave in 1994 and early 1995 to reduce the number of deaths in detention. Others were released in 1995 as part of an amnesty in honor of Kim Jong Il’s birthday.

### **WITNESS: Former Prisoner #19, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4**



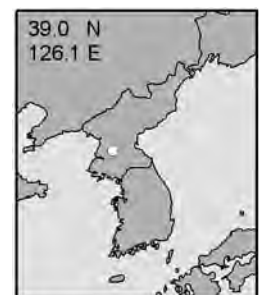
Former Prisoner #19 grew up near Danchun, North Hamgyong Province. In the mid-1990s, when North Korea’s production/distribution system broke down and he was without employment or income, he set up a still to make and sell what he called “Chinese style” rice and corn liquor. Arrested in late 1996, he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to a six-year term at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4. After working for three months there at a limestone furnace, he contracted a lung disease and was transferred to the prison-camp clinic. In those three months, his weight had dropped nearly 30 kilograms (66 pounds). Believing that he would not survive his six-year sentence and observing that, to reduce the number of deaths in detention, extremely sick prisoners were being sent home to recuperate, he drank dirty water. He developed chronic diarrhea as a result and was given a temporary sick release. Away from the limestone furnace, his lungs recovered, and after regaining fifteen kilograms (33 pounds), he fled to China instead of returning to prison.

### **TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4, Samdeung-ri, Kangdong-kun, South Pyong-an Province**

*Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4 is located in Samdeung-ri, Kangdong-kun, in South Pyong-an Province. During Former Prisoner #19’s detention there, some 7,000 convicts mined limestone and made cement in a factory originally built by the Japanese during their occupation of Korea. The prison camp was roughly 2 kilometers (1.24 miles) long by 1.5 kilometers (0.93 miles) wide and was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence.

All of the prisoners at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4 were men, most of them sentenced to anywhere from five to twenty years. The prisoners considered their sentences a cruel hoax, as they did not expect to live long enough to serve their time. Some prisoners mined

Kyo-hwa-so No. 4 Kangdong



limestone in the adjacent mountain. Others crushed the rocks. Still others fired the lime in large kilns. Work started at seven in the morning and lasted until five in the evening, except in the crushing and heating units, where work often continued until ten at night. All aspects of the work were hard labor in dangerous conditions with prisoners frequently suffering chest ailments and lung diseases from limestone dust.

Once a week there was an evening criticism session in groups of up to 500 men where the prison officials would criticize the prisoner called to stand in front of the group of prisoners. There were also lectures on Kim Jong Il and his policies.

Infractions were punished with reduced rations, nominally extended sentences, and detainment in miniature punishment cells. During the eight months that Former Prisoner #19 was held at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4, there were eight public executions in the prison. He did not recall the particular offenses of these eight executed persons, though he did cite the four types of persons who would be executed at the prison camp: prisoners caught trying to escape; prisoners caught after they escaped; persons who committed crimes while on “sick leave”; and prisoners who had committed capital crimes elsewhere and were brought to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4 for execution.

Food rations consisted of a mere 50 grams (under 2 ounces) per meal of mixed corn and wheat, plus cabbage-leaf soup. Former Prisoner #19 weighed 76 kilograms (168 pounds) upon his entry into the *kyo-hwa-so*. After three months, his weight had plummeted to somewhere around 45 kilograms (99 pounds). He was sure that most prisoners weighed less than 50 kilograms (110 pounds).

Prisoners slept head to toe on wooden floors in groups of 50 to 100. The unsanitary living conditions — there was no bathing or changing of clothes, and Former Prisoner #19 says he was able to wash only his face two to three times a month — led to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 4’s particular idiosyncrasy: the cement dust in the prisoners clothing, commingled with dirt and sweat, would cause the tattered fabric to harden, resulting in skin abrasions and infections.

The most salient prison characteristic, however, was more common: exorbitantly high death rates. In Former Prisoner #19’s eight months there, of the eighty persons in his work unit, three prisoners died in work accidents, ten died of malnutrition and disease, and twenty were sent home on “sick leave” in order to reduce the high numbers of deaths in detention.

*See page 55 for prisoner’s sketch of Kyo-hwa-so No. 4 Kangdong.*

### **WITNESS: Former Prisoner #28, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12**



A young man in his early twenties from Chongjin City, North Hamgyung Province, Former Prisoner #28 has a straightforward story. As the food situation in North Korea deteriorated in the middle to late 1990s, he took to smuggling to stay alive and to provide food for the family with which he was living. Arrested in December 1997, he was held in a local jail for three months and then transferred to an *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) *ka-mok* (jail) in Onsong. He was held at the *ka-mok* for another eight months before being sen-

tenced to three years, including time served, to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12 at Jeonger-ri, North Hamgyong Province, for violating, he says, Penal Law 117, Article 2: illegally crossing the North Korea–China border and for illegally transporting money and goods.

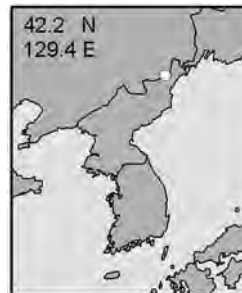
Fortunately, Former Prisoner #28 was pardoned after serving only eight months, from December 1998 through July 1999. In August, he fled to China, making his way to Mongolia, where he joined a group of five North Koreans who made it to Seoul in October 2001.

### TESTIMONY: *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12, Jeonger-ri, North Hamgyong Province

Sometimes also called Onsong-kun *kyo-hwa-so*, although it is not located there, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12 at Jeonger-ri holds some 1,300 to 1,500 men, who mine copper and iron, cut logs, make bricks, and farm. The most salient features of *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12, according to Former Prisoner #28, were the deplorable conditions and the high rates of deaths in detention. Out of twenty-three other prisoners who entered on the same day as Former Prisoner #28, only two survived. The rest died within eight months of arrival, from hard labor and sub-subsistence food rations — small mixtures of corn and beans, with rice added only on holidays. Former Prisoner #28 believes that eight hundred prisoners died while he was there — so many, according to what another prisoner told him, that the guards had to burn the corpses. Former Prisoner #28 says he weighed 50 kilograms (110 pounds) prior to his arrest and only 30 kilograms (66 pounds) upon his release from *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12.

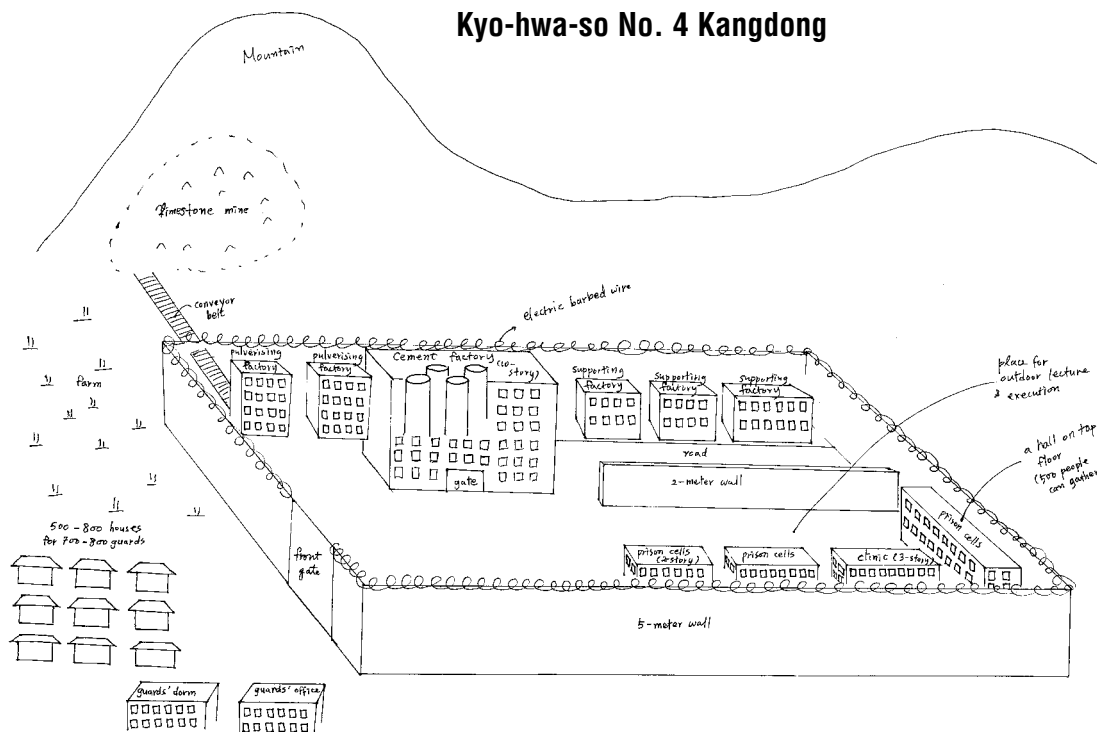
There were no “self-criticism” sessions at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12, but each night the prisoners had to gather at the gates around nine in the evening, at which time the guards would order one of the prisoners to recite the prison rules. Rule-breakers were beaten. Former Prisoner #28 witnessed two public executions of other prisoners who had tried to escape.

Kyo-hwa-so No. 12  
Jeonger-ri



Gangdong Gyohwaso

### Kyo-hwa-so No. 4 Kangdong





## PART TWO

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# DETENTION FACILITIES AND PUNISHMENTS FOR NORTH KOREANS FORCIBLY REPATRIATED FROM CHINA

### Introduction

The second part of this report examines testimony from former North Korean prisoners and detainees about the system of interrogation, detention, forced labor, and extreme punishment that Koreans who are arrested in China experience following their repatriation to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

The system of severe repression that awaits North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China is, in some ways, a separate phenomenon from the lifetime and long-term imprisonments that characterize the *kwan-li-so* (political penal-labor colonies) and *kyo-hwa-so* (prison-labor camps). It is a shorter-term detention/punishment system, which includes *do-jip-kyul-so* (provincial detention centers) and *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training centers). However, it is related to the *kwan-li-so* and *kyo-hwa-so* in that it uses the same brutal forced-labor practices. The long-term imprisonment and short-term detention facilities are both characterized by below-subsistence-level food rations and very high levels of deaths in detention. And both, along with the police jails and interrogation centers that feed them, are administered by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police, which runs the *kyo-hwa-so*, and the *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency police), which runs the *kwan-li-so*.

Most basically, the detention/punishment system for forcibly repatriated North Koreans is an outgrowth of the North Korean approach for dealing with petty criminals convicted of what would be considered, in other countries, misdemeanor offenses or petty infractions. The offenders are incarcerated in short-term provincial or sub-provincial detention facilities, where they are further punished with forced labor. However, many of the “minor” offenses in the DPRK would not normally be considered criminal elsewhere: leaving one's village or traveling within the country without authorization, not showing up at one's designated worksite, or leaving the country — a right guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (to which the DPRK is a State Party).<sup>39</sup>

Estimates of the number of North Koreans who fled famine conditions in the DPRK in the middle and late 1990s by crossing the border into China run as high as 200,000 to 300,000 persons — whole families searching for food, as well as individuals sent to seek work in order to send money back to the rest of their family. Once in China, North Koreans try to blend into communities of the two million or so ethnic Koreans, who have resided for centuries alongside the Han Chinese ethnic majority in the part of northeast China once known as Manchuria.

In addition to the ethnic Korean-Chinese, there are also large numbers of South Koreans working, studying, or traveling in northeast China, which is serviced by direct flights

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<sup>39</sup> While the “right to leave” is an internationally recognized human right, there is no corresponding “right to enter” vis-à-vis another country, control over which remains within the sovereign power of states.

from Seoul: businessmen; students studying traditional medicine (among other subjects); tourists (Mount Paekdu, a famous mountain considered to be the source of Korean civilization, abuts the North Korea–China border); famine-relief project workers; and ministers and missionaries serving and proselytizing among the Korean populations in China. Also, South Korean TV, radio, movies, pop-music videos and recordings are all easily accessible in northeast China.

There is also a great deal of cross-border commerce between North Korea and China, some of which is officially organized by and through North Korean state enterprises or state import-export companies. As the North Korean production system broke down in the 1990s and people no longer were being paid at their assigned work places, large numbers of North Koreans took to buying and selling various goods across the border. Technically, private cross-border buying and selling by North Koreans is illegal.

Periodically, police in China sweep through areas where undocumented North Koreans work and reside, and arrest and deport the migrants and refugees. Some suspect that the frequency and intensity of these sweeps has intensified in recent years, following international publicity about the situation of North Koreans in China, including dramatic attempts by desperate North Koreans to seek asylum in various embassies and consulates there. Others, including some of the repatriated North Koreans caught in these sweeps, believe that the increase in arrests *preceded* the publicity and have been occasioned instead by Chinese desires to stem a Korean refugee flow and by North Korea's desire to limit contact between North Koreans and the South Koreans in China.

Foreign famine-relief workers on the Chinese side of the border have observed the Chinese police buses and vans transporting deportees to North Korea. But the buses and vans often have curtained windows, and an accurate count of the deportees, even when witnesses have observed the deportations, is not possible. Neither the number of forcibly repatriated Koreans nor trends over time can be confidently estimated.<sup>40</sup>

Though it is not presently possible to know the number of forcibly repatriated North Koreans, it is possible to know what happens to those who are repatriated. Having been exposed to the relative freedom and prosperity in China, and completely alienated by their brutal mistreatment after being handed back to the North Korean police, many of those who survive their mistreatment flee back to China upon their release from detention and recovery from detention-related illnesses and injuries. A small number of those North Koreans who have fled the DPRK a second, or even third, time have obtained asylum in South Korea, usually after a harrowing, months-long trek south through China and then further south through Southeast Asia, before flying to Seoul. Some defectors go through Mongolia or Hong Kong. The stories of some of these individuals are told on the following pages.

Most of these former detainees are recent arrivals in South Korea and still have family members in North Korea. For these reasons, those giving testimony must remain any-

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<sup>40</sup> For more information on the situation of North Koreans in China see "A Field Survey Report of the North Korean Refugees in China," Dr. Christine Y. Chang, The Commission to Help North Korean Refugees (CNKR), December 1999, Seoul ([www.nk-refugees.or.kr](http://www.nk-refugees.or.kr)), and "The Invisible Exodus: North Koreans in the People's Republic of China." Human Rights Watch report, (New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch) Vol. 14, No. 8 (E), November 2002.

mous, but their experiences can be simply summarized: Upon repatriation to North Korea they are detained in a jail or detention/interrogation facility. In Korean, a police jail is called a *ka-mok*. Both the regular police, the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency),<sup>41</sup> and the *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) political police, have such jails in the provinces along the North Korea–China border.<sup>42</sup> Some of the former detainees use the word *ku-ryu-jang*, meaning a temporary detention place or facility, often inside a police station.<sup>43</sup>

Whether they took place in a *ku-ryu-jang* or *ka-mok*, and whether they were conducted by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* police or the *bo-wi-bu* police, the interrogations described by former prisoners all followed a pattern clearly outlined by Former Detainee #22, a young man originally from Kaesong. Essentially, the authorities ask: “Why did you go to China, where did you go, and what did you do in each place?” And then, more ominously: “Did you meet any South Koreans?” “Did you go to a Christian church?” “Did you watch or listen to South Korean TV or radio?” and “Were you trying to go to South Korea?”

All the former detainees interviewed for this report firmly believed that an affirmative answer to the latter questions would result in execution or their being sent to a *kwan-li-so* or *kyo-hwa-so*,<sup>44</sup> so they initially denied any contact with South Koreans or Christians while in China. Their denials were not considered credible by their interrogators, who attempted to starve and beat admissions out of the detainees. Some of the former prisoners interviewed for this report stuck to their denials; others, broken by hunger and torture, admitted that they had met South Koreans or gone to a Christian church service. One interviewee said she was in such pain that she begged her jailers to kill her to end her suffering.

Usually after several weeks of interrogation, the detainees were sent to short-term detention-labor facilities called in Korean *jip-kyul-so* and *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae*. None of the former detainees interviewed for this report mentioned any kind of trial or judicial process before being sent to these hard-labor detention/punishment facilities.

*Jip-kyul-so* literally translates as a “gathering place.” A *do-jip-kyul-so* is a provincial detention center. In practice, these are short-term hard-labor detention facilities for those serving up to six month sentences. Several interviewees reported that both the regular police and the political police run *jip-kyul-so* detention centers for small-time or “small-crime” persons as well as for North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China. *Jip-kyul-so* are characterized by hard labor, such as construction work or brick-making, and subsistence food rations, the combination of which causes large numbers of deaths in detention (even given the shortness of the sentences) and large numbers of “sick-releases” (the idea being that gravely ill prisoners will either die at home, thus reducing the number of deaths in detention, or recover at home before returning to the *jip-kyul-so* to complete their sentences).

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<sup>41</sup> Before 1998, these police were called the *Sa-hoe-an-jeon-bu* Social Safety Agency.

<sup>42</sup> Generally speaking, the *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* administer the *kwan-li-so*, and the *In-min-bo-an-seong* administer the *kyo-hwa-so*.

<sup>43</sup> Some North Koreans interviewed for this report used *ka-mok* and *ku-ryu-jang* more or less interchangeably, with *ku-ryu-jang* having a somewhat more generic connotation.

<sup>44</sup> Three of the former prisoners interviewed for the first part of this report were sent to a *kwan-li-so* or a *kyo-hwa-so*, following their post-repatriation interrogations.

*Ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* literally translates as “labor-training corp” or “labor-training camp,” sometimes abbreviated in English by South Korean human rights activists as “LTC.” The LTCs are even shorter-term *jip-kyul-so*, set up to accommodate the overflow from the established detention centers caused by the large numbers of Koreans forcibly repatriated from China. One interviewee described the LTCs as localized “feeder” facilities for the *jip-kyul-so*. Another interviewee described the LTCs as a “not-in-the-statute-books” response to the burgeoning numbers of North Koreans traveling without authorization, working at enterprises other than their assigned occupations at idled state production facilities, or fleeing to China in response to famine conditions in Korea. One interviewee stated that it was becoming the practice to have separate facilities for Koreans forcibly repatriated from China because the returnees were telling the common “light crime” criminals in the *jip-kyul-so* about the “freedom and prosperity” in China. The LTCs seem to be sub-provincial facilities, where various labor or production functions are not performed on-site, but where mobile forced-labor brigades spend nights. The LTC detainees are made to march rapidly, or jog slowly, it is variously said, to their various and changing worksites — chanting political slogans or singing what they describe as “silly songs” of praise to Kim Jong Il as they move along.

## **Worst of All**

Apart from the torture during interrogation, and the high levels of deaths in detention reported by the former detainees, repatriated pregnant North Koreans thrown into the interrogation-detention system face ethnically-motivated infanticide and forced abortions, a particularly reprehensible phenomena of repression described in more detail on the following pages.

All refugee accounts reported the same objective proclaimed by the North Korean prison and jail authorities for these atrocities: preventing women who became pregnant while in China from giving birth to “half-Chinese” babies, meaning babies that are half ethnic Han Chinese, China’s majority ethnic group. Indeed, some of the North Korean women who fled to China had married or were trafficked to (sold, or provided for involuntary or quasi-voluntary “arranged marriages”) ethnic Chinese men. Other North Korean women who fled to China had married or taken up with Korean-speaking citizens of China of Korean ethnic origin. But this potential distinction seemingly made no difference. North Korean women who were pregnant when they were repatriated were compelled to have abortions, or their babies were killed immediately after birth.

Eight eyewitnesses or persons with firsthand accounts of ethnic infanticide were interviewed for this report. The accounts of ethnic infanticide occur in only three places: Sinuiju, Onsong, and Chongjin. Sinuiju and Chongjin are large port cities in north North Korea on the west and east coasts, respectively. Little information is presently available on the extent to which this practice is carried out elsewhere along the North Korea–China border, except for Onsong. But Chongjin and Sinuiju are the main population centers from which the largest number of “second-time” North Korean escapees would come. And the stories are too similar in too many details to be coincidental.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The eyewitnesses of ethnic infanticide interviewed for this report are themselves former detainees who fled North Korea a second time and were granted asylum in Seoul. A Belgian NGO, Human Rights Without Frontiers, interviewed several former North Korean detainees still hiding in China and obtained testimony of baby-killing at Hoeryong ([www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net)).

## WITNESSES AND TESTIMONY

### WITNESS: CHOI Yong Hwa, Provincial Detention Center, South Sinuiju



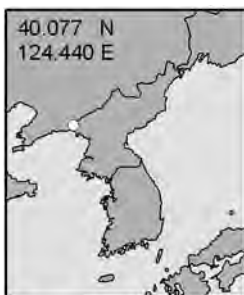
CHOI Yong Hwa is a shy and soft-spoken twenty-five-year-old woman from Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province. She spent two months (May and June 2000) in the *do-jip-kyul-so* provincial detention center in South Sinuiju, North Pyong-an Province, across the North Korean border from Dandong, China.

Choi had lived with her father and younger brother while working in a distribution center, but as the food situation in North Korea deteriorated between 1996 and 1998, and as the country's distribution system broke down, she left that work to become a petty trader, mostly selling cuttlefish, in order to make enough money to provide food for her family. When the petty marketing did not generate enough money for food, she paid a trafficker 200 *won* to take her to China in 1998. She worked at a restaurant in Yanji, China, and then as a tour guide for visiting South Koreans in Dalian. Caught by Chinese police in Dalian, she was held for a month before being sent to Dandong, where she was turned over to North Korean police.

Interrogated by the *bo-wi-bu* (State Security Protection Agency) in Sinuiju, Choi convincingly denied meeting South Koreans in China. (She was also explicitly questioned about attending Christian churches in China.) Her interrogators threatened to send her to Jeonger-ri *kyo-hwa-so* in North Hamgyong Province, which she had heard about from a neighbor who had been sent there, but she ended up being sent to the *do-jip-kyul-so* provincial detention center in Sinuiju. After only ten days there, she became too ill to work, from malnutrition and exhaustion: she had been unable to sleep at night owing to infestations of maggots and lice in her sleeping quarters. Choi was released after serving two months, during which time two other detainees had died. Choi's jailers simply did not want another death in detention.

Upon release, after regaining her health, Choi crossed again into China and made her way to Dalian. She traveled west by train to Beijing, and on New Year's Day 2002, she took a train to Kunming. She was part of a group of five North Korean refugees who crossed into Myanmar (Burma) but were apprehended and turned over to the police in China, who fortunately released them after being persuaded that they were Korean-Chinese not North Koreans. After their release, they successfully made their way through Southeast Asia. Choi obtained asylum in South Korea in March of 2002 and was interviewed for this report in Seoul in August 2002.

South Sinuiju  
Detention Center



### TESTIMONY: South Sinuiju *Do-jip-kyul-so* (Provincial Detention Center)

The South Sinuiju *do-jip-kyul-so* in North Pyong-an Province held roughly 100 detainees during Choi's detention, most of them between twenty and thirty years of age, more of them women than men. The facility was primarily for North Koreans repatriated from China who had successfully avoided contact with South Koreans. Two cells were for men and women accused of minor crimes, and four cells held repatriated persons. Detainees performed supervised agricultural and construction work at off-site loca-

tions. Their work day began between four-thirty and five in the morning and lasted until seven or eight at night, with half-hour breaks for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Meals consisted of dried corn, which the prisoners would wet, and salted radish-leaf soup. The inmates were also allowed to eat grass and other plants while working outside the detention center. Still, nourishment was insufficient. During Choi's two months in detention, two women who had been detained for three to four months died of malnutrition. Also during these two months, one female detainee was coerced into having sex with a guard.

Among the detainees were ten pregnant women, three of whom were in the eighth to ninth month of pregnancy. Choi and two other non-pregnant women were assigned to assist these three pregnant women, who were too weak to walk alone, in walking to a military hospital outside the detention center. The woman assisted by Choi was given a labor-inducing injection and shortly thereafter gave birth. While Choi watched in horror, the baby was suffocated with a wet towel in front of the mother, who passed out in distress. When the woman regained consciousness, both she and Choi were taken back to the detention center. The two other non-pregnant women who assisted the two other pregnant detainees told Choi that those newborns were also suffocated in front of the mothers. The explanation provided was that "no half-Han [Chinese] babies would be tolerated."

### **WITNESS AND TESTIMONY: Former Detainee #24, Provincial Detention Center, South Sinuiju**



Former Detainee #24 is a sixty-six-year-old grandmother from Chulan-kun, North Hamgyong Province. In 1997, her children were starving, so she fled to China with her husband, who was a former soldier, and five of her children. Two of her children were caught crossing the border, but the rest of the family lived in China for three years. Two of the children who made it with her to China were later caught and repatriated to North Korea, and her husband eventually died of natural causes. Afterward, she lived with her granddaughter in Yangji until they were apprehended by Chinese police while visiting Dandong.

Former Detainee #24 was eventually forcibly repatriated in a group of fifty North Koreans, some of whom were pregnant women, bound together by their wrists. They were taken, initially, for eighteen days to the Namindong *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police *ku-ryu-jang* in Sinuiju, who initially accused Former Detainee #24 of being corrupted by capitalism in China. She convinced them that she had gone to China only for food, so she was sent for one month to the *do-jip-kyul-so* in South Sinuiju run by the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police. Though she had heard that Kim Jong Il had recently said North Korean repatriates should not be treated harshly, there were beatings.

Detainees were fed the usual steamed corn, and as it was midsummer, most prisoners were sent out to work in the rice fields. This grandmother was too old and weak for such labor, and as she herself had had seven children, she was taken in the mornings to a nearby medical building to help care for the pregnant detainees. She helped deliver seven babies, some of which were full-term, some of which were injection-induced abortions. All of the babies were killed.

The first baby was born to a twenty-eight-year-old woman named Lim, who had been happily married to a Chinese man. The baby boy was born healthy and unusually large, owing to the mother's ability to eat well during pregnancy in China. Former Detainee #24 assisted in holding the baby's head during delivery and then cut the umbilical cord. But when she started to hold the baby and wrap him in a blanket, a guard grabbed the newborn by one leg and threw it in a large, plastic-lined box. A doctor explained that since North Korea was short on food, the country should not have to feed the children of foreign fathers. When the box was full of babies, Former Detainee #24 later learned, it was taken outside and buried.

She next helped deliver a baby to a woman named Kim, who also gave birth to a healthy full-term boy. As Former Detainee #24 caressed the baby, it tried to suckle her finger. The guard again came over and yelled at her to put the baby in the box. As she stood up, the guard slapped her, chipping her tooth. The third baby she delivered was premature — the size of an ear of corn — and the fourth baby was even smaller. She gently laid those babies in the box. The next day she delivered three more very premature babies and also put them in the box. The babies in the box gave her nightmares.

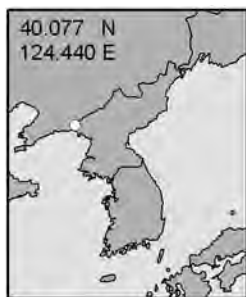
Two days later, the premature babies had died but the two full-term baby boys were still alive. Even though their skin had turned yellow and their mouths blue, they still blinked their eyes. The agent came by, and seeing that two of the babies in the box were not dead yet, stabbed them with forceps at a soft spot in their skulls. Former Detainee #24 says she then lost her self-control and started screaming at the agent, who kicked her so hard in the leg that she fainted. Deemed unsuitable for further hospital work, she was returned to the detention center until her release several weeks later.

Upon release, Former Detainee #24 returned to China but was again caught and this time repatriated to Hoeryong. Separated from her granddaughter, she became hysterical and started singing Christian hymns that she had learned in China, and ranting against Kim Jong Il for making Koreans leave their native villages while God took care of Korean people in China. Fortunately, her guards regarded her as a crazy old woman, not an enemy of the regime. Indeed, they took pity on her, even reuniting her with her granddaughter and helping the two of them to again cross the Tumen River into China. This time, she met some South Korean Christian relief workers who helped enable her and her granddaughter to make the trek through China to Southeast Asia. She arrived in South Korea in March 2001.

The interviewer had difficulty finding words to describe the sadness in this grandmothers' eyes and the anguish on her face as she recounted her experience as a midwife at the detention center in South Sinuiju.

*See satellite photograph of the South Sinuiju Detention Center on page 119.*

South Sinuiju  
Detention Center



## WITNESS: Former Detainee #1, Nongpo Provincial Detention Center, Chongjin<sup>46</sup>



Former Detainee #1 was born in 1967 in Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province. He served ten years as a radio operator in the North Korean military. Upon discharge, he became a low-level courier in business transactions between North Korea and China. In 1997, he was arrested in Yanji, where he had gone to collect money owed in return for goods imported from Japan and re-exported to China without North Korean authorization. Turned over to the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security

Agency) police at Musan, he was interrogated for a day and then turned over to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police for a week of interrogation. He was then turned over again to the *bo-wi-bu* at Chongjin, who placed him in a police jail in Song Pyung district in Chongjin. There, for twenty days he was shackled and forced to kneel without moving whenever he was not undergoing additional interrogation sessions. During these multiple interrogations, Former Detainee #1 was questioned about listening to South Korean radio while in the military and accused of wanting to go to South Korea. He convincingly denied having listened to South Korean radio while in the North Korean military, even though he had. He completely denied allegations of espionage. And he did not disclose information about others involved in the unauthorized re-export scheme that the officials and staff of the state enterprise had organized.

Finally, Former Detainee #1 was sent to a *do-jip-kyul-so* (provincial detention center) at Nongpo. At one point, driven by hunger, he slipped away to his family home to get some food. Caught while trying to sneak back into the provincial detention center, he was beaten unconscious for having escaped. Emaciated from forced labor — making bricks — his legs became numb. He was unable to walk up or down stairs and unable to carry bricks. In fact, he reports that he was so “skin and bones” that he could not even sit. Unable to change clothes or bathe, he became covered with lice. As his jailers did not want him to die in custody, Former Detainee #1 was released in October after only two months in detention.

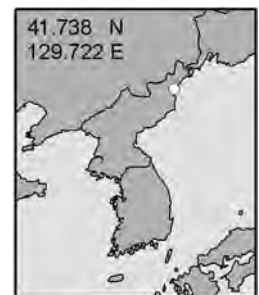
It took until May of the following year for Former Detainee #1 to recover movement in his legs. At that point, accompanied by his mother, he fled to China. They gradually made their way south through China and Southeast Asia, arriving in South Korea in March 2000. Interviewed for this report in August 2002, this former detainee still had scars on his shoulder and hip from the chemicals in the hot, newly fired bricks he was required to carry while in detention.

## TESTIMONY: Nongpo Provincial Detention Center, Chongjin

Nongpo, now sometimes also called Eunjung, is a sub-district of Song Pyung district in Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province. Nongpo held 120 detainees during Former Detainee #1's imprisonment: roughly seventy men and fifty women. Some inmates were single. Some were married couples, but the husbands and wives slept separately in the different men's and women's cells, where roughly twenty persons slept head-to-

<sup>46</sup> Some former prisoners referred to this detention center as Nongpo, and some referred to it as Chongjin. Nongpo is a section of Chongjin City. Some former prisoners referred to it as a provincial detention center, and some referred to it as a detention center. The author has tried to preserve each reference according to the way in which each former prisoner referred to this facility. For ease of reference, each visual image of this facility is referred to as Nongpo Detention Center.

Nongpo Detention Center





toe in small rooms. Conditions were highly unsanitary, with many detainees covered with lice.

Most of the women detainees were held for up to six months for having gone to China. Some of the men detainees were also held for going to China, but most of them were held for “selling” state property. Detainees were required to perform hard labor: brick-making from morning to evening, in addition to agricultural work (planting and harvesting crops). The harsh chemicals used in making bricks left the detainees with bruised and sore hands. The freshly fired bricks were heavy to lift and exhausting to carry. Rations were extremely meager: salty, watery cabbage-leaf soup and small cakes made of wheat chaff. Evenings were occupied with group self-criticism and silent, motionless self-reflection. A criticism session would not end until detainees proclaimed their own or someone else’s wrongdoing. The detainees would make up wrongdoings to end the sessions.

A typical day started at five in the morning with a thirty-minute jog to an agricultural worksite for two hours of farming work followed by a half-hour breakfast. Detainees then made bricks until noon, when they were given a half-hour for lunch. Lunch was followed by repair and work preparation until one. Then came six-and-a-half more hours of brick-making followed by a half hour for dinner. Dinner was followed by a self-criticism session, which lasted from eight until ten and was sometimes followed by interrogations. The work was so hard, with slow workers beaten with shovels, that the detainees wanted to be transferred from the detention-labor facility to a “real prison,” meaning a *kyo-hwa-so*.

Within his two months of detention at Nongpo, Former Detainee #1, witnessed, out of a total of 120 inmates, one public execution (a man who had sold cable in China), three deaths from malnutrition and related diseases, and one death from tetanus.

*See sketch of Nongpo Detention Center on page 69 and satellite photograph on page 120.*

### **WITNESS: Former Detainee #8, Chongjin Detention Center**



Former Detainee #8 is a thirty-three-year-old woman from Musan, North Hamgyong Province. She went to China in 1998 and married a Chinese citizen of ethnic Korean origin. Caught by Chinese police in May 2000, she was sent back to North Korea in June and interrogated by Onsong State Security Agency personnel, who asked her why and how many times she had left Korea and if she had met South Koreans or went to Christian churches while in China.

Satisfied that she had done neither of these things, while threatening her with death if she went to China again, they sent her for two months detention at the Chongjin *jip-kyul-so*. Upon release, Former Detainee #8 nevertheless went back to China. Believing it was unsafe to remain with her Korean-Chinese husband, she decided to try to get to South Korea. Starting her journey in late October 2001, she reached Seoul in mid-2002, having traveled to southern China and then through Southeast Asia.

### **TESTIMONY: Chongjin Detention Center, North Hamgyong Province**

Located in North Hamgyong Province, this provincial detention center held roughly ninety detainees — some thirty men and some sixty women — nearly all of whom had

been repatriated from China. Detainees worked from six in the morning until seven in the evening on seasonal agricultural work or collecting firewood, on a diet of dried corn and radish-leaf soup. Detainees often worked for up to three months while waiting for local police to come to escort them back to their assigned places of residence.

According to Former Detainee #8, women at the Chongjin *jip-kyul-so* were not hit by guards but men were, though “only” with fists, not clubs. However, upon entry, the women were asked if they were pregnant. If less than three to four months pregnant, the women detainees were subjected to surgical abortions. If more than four months pregnant, female detainees were given labor-inducing injections, after which it was believed by Former Detainee #8 that the babies were killed. During Former Detainee #8’s two months of detention, six women were forced to have abortions.

Reportedly, there was no interrogation at Chongjin *jip-kyul-so*. Instead there were nightly classes on North Korean rules and regulations, accompanied by nighttime self-criticism sessions in groups of fifteen. If one member of the group of fifteen made some mistake or error during labor, or did something against the rules, the whole group would be punished.

### **WITNESS AND TESTIMONY: Former Detainee #9: Onsong *Ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (Labor-Training Camp) and Chongjin Provincial Detention Center**



A thirty-eight-year-old native of Shinpo, South Hamgyong Province, Former Detainee #9 was desperate for work in 1998, so he went to China and spent two years in Yanji and almost a year in Harbin before being caught by the Chinese police in June 2000. Deported to Onsong, he was jailed for ten days, during which time he convincingly denied having met any South Korean Christians while in China, even though he had. He was sent to the Onsong *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* while awaiting transfer to the Chongjin *jip-kyul-so*. While again being transferred by train to a detention center in South Hamgyong Province, he escaped from his guards. He fled to China and then made his way down through southern China to Southeast Asia before gaining asylum in South Korea in January 2002.

In July 2000, when Former Detainee #9 was detained at the Onsong labor-training camp, run by the Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) police, there were roughly seventy detainees: some forty repatriates from China and some thirty petty criminals. Detainees began work at half past four in the morning, cultivating crops. In the afternoons and evenings they did heavier labor — making bricks, sometimes until half past ten at night. At other times of the year, the detainees were sent to the mines, even though their detention was short-term while they waited to be transferred elsewhere.

After he was transferred to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) *do-jip-kyul-so* at Chongjin, Former Detainee #9’s labor assignment in mid-2000 was additional agricultural work. There was no bathing, brushing of teeth, or changing of clothes. He was still wearing the same clothes he was wearing when arrested in China. Food rations were the usual small amounts of boiled mashed corn and salty radish-leaf soup. Farm animals, he says, ate better.

The detainee population at the Chongjin detention center at that time was made up of thirty to forty men and fifty to sixty women. The guards would force the detainees to hit each other, a practice that Former Detainee #9 believed was designed to allow the North Korean authorities to assure the Chinese that the police were not beating the prisoners. There were no deaths in detention during his brief stay at Chongjin, though he mentioned that the petty criminals there, who had been detained longer, complained that those who died at the center were not given proper burials. Former Detainee #9's biggest complaint regarded "the inhumane treatment of pregnant women." He saw a group of ten taken away for mandatory abortions, and the women were returned to hard labor the very next day.

### **WITNESS AND TESTIMONY: Former Detainee #21, Onsong *Ku-ryu-jang* (Detention Facility)**



A thirty-eight-year-old native of Kangwong Province, Former Detainee #21 formerly worked at a state-run fertilizer factory. But production slowed and then stopped completely in 1997. Without work and running out of food, she and her husband fled to China in January 1999. They were caught by the Chinese police and repatriated to North Korea in August. She was held seven months for interrogation at the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police *ku-ryu-jang* at Namyang-ku, Onsong-kun, North Hamgyong Province.

At that time, the *In-min-bo-an-seong* jail at Onsong held about 130 detainees, forty to fifty of whom were women. Former Detainee #21's husband was put in a men's cell, and she was put in one of the women's cells. Her husband was beaten so badly that he confessed their desire to go to South Korea, after which time he died in detention from paratyphoid, a lice-borne disease that results in acute diarrhea, leading, if not treated, to dehydration and death. Her husband was left medically unattended for three days in men's Cell Block No. 8. She was beaten with sticks, and the police agents beat her head against cement walls until she screamed at them to get it over and kill her too.

According to Former Detainee #21, beatings were common and harsh. Detainees were beaten so badly that they confessed to things they had not done. Women were beaten on the fingertips. One woman who was very ill, near death, was made to stand up and sit down repeatedly until she collapsed and died. Among the fifteen women with Former Detainee #21 in Cell Block No. 2, there were two repatriated pregnant women: one, six months pregnant; the other, eight months. Both were taken out for abortions. Upon return, both women that their babies had been born alive and then were suffocated in vinyl cloth.

After seven months' detention at Onsong, Former Detainee #21 was transferred to Chongjin *bo-wi-bu jip-kyul-so* in Chongjin, where she was held for another three months. Following her release from Chongjin, she again fled to China, even more determined to seek asylum in South Korea.

## WITNESS AND TESTIMONY: Former Detainee #25, Onsong Detention Center and Nongpo Detention Center



A young woman in her mid-thirties, Former Detainee #25 was born in Saetbyeol-kun, North Hamgyong Province. In April 1998, when the food shortage in North Korea became extremely severe where she was living, she went to China to make enough money to buy corn. A year later, she was caught and repatriated to North Korea. She was sent first to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police *jip-kyul-so* provincial detention center for *wirl-gyong-ja* — “illegal border crossers” — at

Onsong, North Hamgyong Province, for five weeks in the autumn of 1999, and then taken for the month of December to the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* detention center in Chongjin City.

When she was released from Nongpo, a local police officer escorted her back to her hometown. She was made to promise not to go to China again, but since there was no food at home, she waded across the icy Tumen River on December 31, 1999. She forded the icy stream because there were too many guards at the spots where the river was frozen. She lived in China for two years before going by bus and on foot down through China and Southeast Asia. She arrived in Seoul in June of 2002.

### Onsong *Jip-kyul-so* (Detention Center), North Hamgyong Province

At Onsong, during the time of Former Detainee #25's detention, roughly 150 persons were held in two rooms. The detainees, who were assigned to make bricks, were told that they were not human beings but dogs and pigs. They were made to sing “silly songs” in honor of Kim Jong Il. Detainees were asked the usual question: had they met any South Koreans or Christians while in China? Two women confessed to having converted to Christianity while in China and were taken away by the police agents, who told the remaining women that the two Christian converts had been executed and that the rest of the women should consider themselves warned.

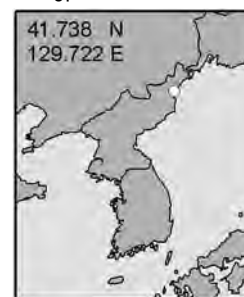
When she was first taken to Onsong, Former Detainee #25 thought she was looking at ghosts, the detainees were so skinny. She herself lost 5 kilograms (11 pounds) during the five weeks she was detained, being fed only half-bowls of corn soup.

### Nongpo *Jip-kyul-so* (Detention Center), Chongjin City

At the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* in Chongjin, in December 1999, roughly 180 detainees were required to construct a fish farm outside the detention center. During the month that Former Detainee #25 was there, several detainees who had been arrested in China while seeking to enter Mongolia — presumed by North Korean officials, perhaps not incorrectly, as an attempt to reach South Korea rather than to work for food in China — were transferred. The Nongpo detainees were taken to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22, or “two-two,” described in Part One. Another female prisoner, a former teacher who had also been in Mongolia, was beaten almost to death, and the next day was taken out either to die or else to be transferred to “two-two.” A four-year-old boy, who was imprisoned with his mother, died of malnutrition.

According to Former Detainee #25, almost eighty percent of the detainees at Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* were women, ten to twelve of whom were pregnant. The women were told they would not be allowed to leave the detention center still carrying “children of betrayers” in their wombs.

Nongpo Detention Center



Former Detainee #25 observed that the pregnant women were denied food and water and were kicked in the stomach to induce bleeding. She saw several women taken away for abortion-inducing injections before they were brought back to Nongpo. Four babies were born in a room set aside for birthing. The babies were put in a wicker basket in an adjacent store-room, covered in vinyl cloth, and left to die.

### **WITNESS: Former Detainee #26, Nongpo Detention Center**



A native of Chongjin City, North Hamgyong Province, Former Detainee #26 is a mother of four and a grandmother of two. In the mid-1990s, her husband died of natural causes. As the family slowly ran out of money and food in the late 1990s, she sent two daughters to China for work, but they were caught by traffickers and sold to Korean-Chinese men. Former Detainee #26, along with her son and a grandchild, then went to China to try to rescue her daughters and reunite her family. She found her daughters in Wongchun and took them to Yangji, where they lived for a year and a half before being caught by the Chinese police in April 2002.

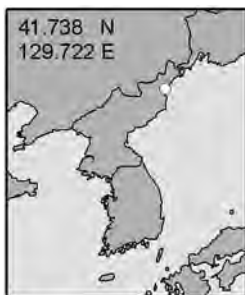
First repatriated to the Musan *jip-kyul-so*, this grandmother was sent next to the Onsong *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police jail. There, she was forced to kneel motionless for a day before being sent to the Onsong *bo-wi-bu ku-ryu-jang* (detention center) for “heavy interrogation.” (She believes that a whole family together in China was deemed a more politicized desertion than a single family member in China trying to earn money to support the rest of the family back in North Korea.)

She was then transferred to the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* detention center, where after a month, a guard pushed her to the ground, breaking one of her ribs. She was sent home for forty days of “sick leave” in order for her rib to heal. However, after thirty days on leave, in June, she again crossed the Tumen River to look for her remaining daughter, who had not been caught in April and had remained in China. Within the month, Former Detainee #26 was caught again and this time repatriated to Hoeryong *bo-wi-bu* jail, where she was made to sit motionless for six days. Her next destination was the Onsong Sambong-ku *bo-wi-bu* police station, where she was heavily interrogated and threatened with being sent to Oro No. 22 prison-labor camp. She begged and bribed the guards, who sent her instead to the *In-min-bo-an-seong* jail for a week of solitary confinement in a dark cell (without windows or lights). After becoming ill, she was given a sick release.

After a week at home, she again fled to China in August 2001, where she remained in hiding until December. This time her luck turned, when she met a Korean-American missionary in Yangji who helped her join a group of nine persons on the “underground” land-route. After traveling through Beijing and Kunming, the group made their way through Southeast Asia. In June 2002, she reached Seoul and obtained asylum.

When interviewed for this report in Seoul in November 2002, Former Detainee #26, who had suffered so much and tried so hard to help her family avert starvation and keep them together, was accompanied by her young granddaughter. Former Detainee #26’s daughter, the granddaughter’s mother, had been located in China and assisted in joining another group of North Korean refugees on the long overland trek to Thailand.

Nongpo Detention Center

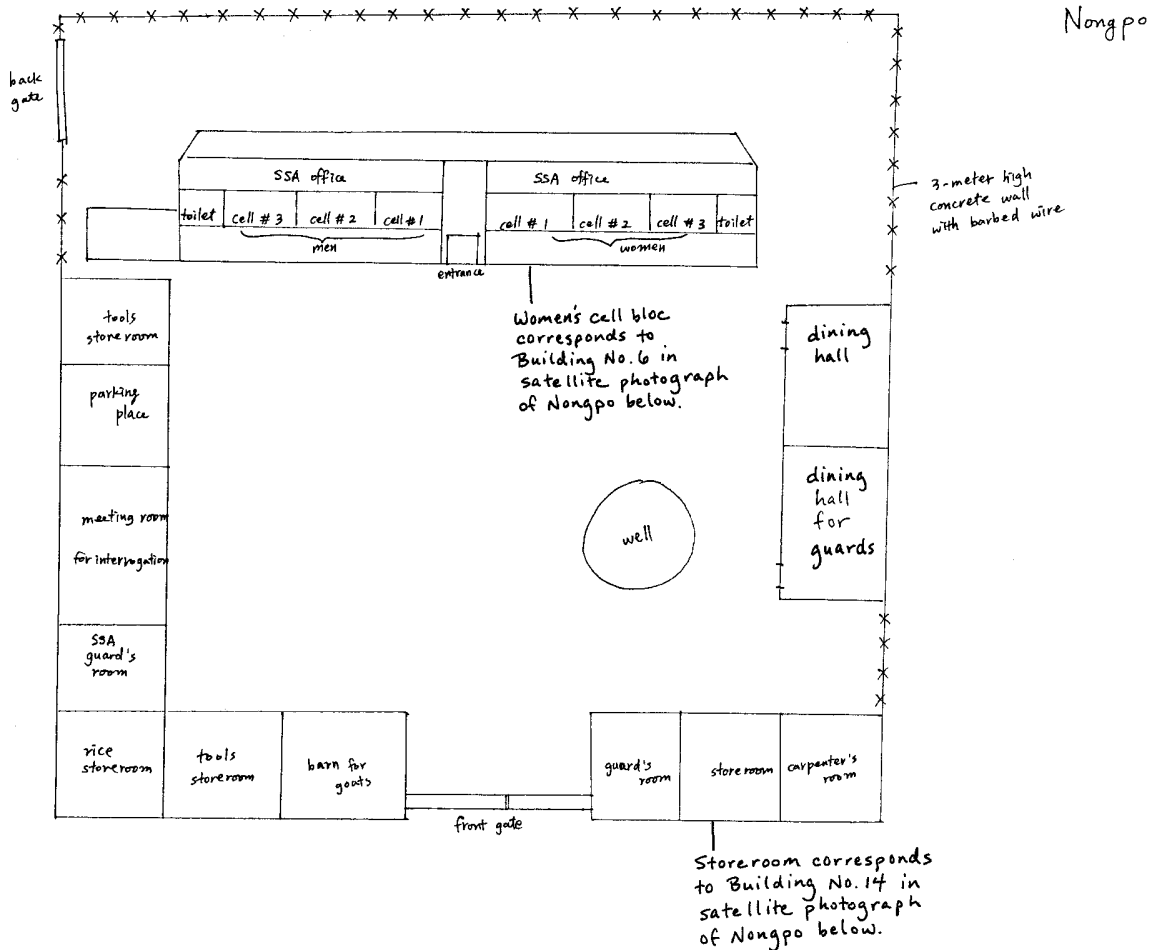


Unfortunately, she was caught crossing the Vietnamese border and turned over to the Chinese police. As of September 2003, her whereabouts were still unknown.

### TESTIMONY: Nongpo Detention Center, Chongjin

According to Former Detainee #26, in May 2000, the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* in Chongjin held roughly 75 men, 175 women, and a few orphans and teenagers. The women detainees were held in three rooms: one room for paratyphoid sufferers, one room for pregnant women, and the last room for 130 female prisoners, whose quarters were so cramped that there was not space for all of them to simultaneously lie down for sleep. Detainees were fed some 70–75 kernels of boiled corn per meal.

In May 2000, twenty-eight women among the detainees were from three to nine months pregnant. Former Detainee #26 saw three eight-month-old fetuses aborted and seven babies killed. Several women from Cell No. 1 (see sketch below and satellite photograph on page 120), including Former Detainee #26, were brought over to Cell No. 3 to help deliver the babies. When the babies were born, they were placed face down on the ground. Some babies died right away; others lay there breathing longer. If any babies were still alive after two days, the guards would smother them in wet vinyl. The babies lying on the ground could be seen by the women standing at the front of the other cells. The guards would say that the mothers had to see and hear the babies die because these babies were Chinese.



## PART THREE

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### SUMMARY OF TORTURE AND INFANTICIDE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY FORMER PRISONERS AND DETAINEES INTERVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

#### I. Torture Summary

According to almost all of the former-prisoner testimony gathered for this report — from Ali Lamada’s 1967 Sariwon prison testimony to the post-2000 testimonies of North Koreans forcibly repatriated from China — the practice of torture permeates the North Korean prison and detention system.

- Former Detainee #1 was beaten unconscious for hunger-related rule infractions in 1997 at the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* (detention center) in Chongjin City. He also reported that detainees there were beaten with shovels if they did not work fast enough.
- Former Detainee #3 reported the use of an undersized punishment box at the Danchun prison camp in which camp rule-breakers were held for fifteen days, unable to stand-up or lie down. He also reported that beatings of the prisoners by guards were common.
- LEE Young Kuk reported that he was subjected to motionless-kneeling and water torture and facial and shin beatings with rifle butts at the *Kuk-ga-bo-wi-bu* interrogation/detention facility in Pyongyang in 1994, leaving permanent damage in one ear, double vision in one eye, and his shins still bruised and discolored as of late 2002.
- KANG Chol Hwan reported the existence of separate punishment cells within *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 Yodok, from which few prisoners returned alive.
- Former Prisoner #6 reported that prisoners were beaten to death by prison work-unit leaders at Danchun *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 77 in North Hamgyong Province in the late 1980s.
- AHN Myong Chol, a former guard, reported that all three of the *kwan-li-so* at which he worked had isolated detention facilities in which many prisoners died from mistreatment, and that at *Kwan-li-so* No. 22 there were so many deaths by beatings from guards that the guards were told to be less violent.
- Former Detainee #8 reported that male prisoners were beaten by guards at the Chongjin *jip-kyul-so* in mid-2000.
- Former Detainee #9 reported that detainees at the Onsong *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training camp) were compelled to beat each other.
- KIM Sung Min reported that in 1997 at the Onsong *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) detention center, his fingers were broken and he was kicked and beaten on the head and face until his ears, eyes, nose, and mouth bled.
- RHYU Young Il saw, in 1997, that out of six persons in an adjacent cell in the *bo-wi-bu* interrogation facility where he was detained in Pyongyang, two were carried out on stretchers, two could walk only with the assistance of guards, and two could walk out by themselves. Detainees who moved while they were sup-

posed to be sitting motionless and silent for long periods were handcuffed from the upper bars of their cells with their feet off the floor. Detainees who talked when they were supposed to be sitting motionless and silent were compelled to slap and hit each other.

- Former Prisoner #12 reported that at Hoeryong *kyo-hwa-so* in the early to middle 1990s, minor rule-breakers were beaten by their cellmates on the orders of the guards, and major rule-breakers were placed in a 1.5-meter-square (16.5-foot-square) punishment cell for a week or more.
- LEE Min Bok reported being beaten “many times” on his fingernails and the back of his hands with a metal rod during interrogation at the Hyesan detention center in 1990. He also reported that at the Hyesan *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) detention facility, where he was subsequently held, prisoners were compelled to beat each other. Lee witnessed one prisoner, KIM Jae Chul, beaten to death.
- Former Detainee #15 reported that he was beaten with chairs and sticks at both the Hoeryong and Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* jails in early 2002.
- LEE Soon Ok reported that she experienced beatings, strappings, and water torture leading to loss of consciousness, and was held outside in freezing January weather at the Chongjin *In-min-bo-an-seong* pre-trial detention center in 1986. Her account of beatings and brutalities in the early to middle 1990s at Kaecheon women’s prison, *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1, (in her prison memoirs) are too numerous to detail here.
- JI Hae Nam confirmed the existence of miniature punishment cells at *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 1 and reported that beatings and kicking of women prisoners were a daily occurrence in the mid-1990s. She also reported beatings, during interrogation or for prison regulation infractions, in late 1999 at the Sinuiju *bo-wi-bu* jail, where she was required to kneel motionless, hit with broomsticks, and required to do stand-up/sit-down repetitions to the point of collapse, in her case in thirty to forty minutes.
- KIM Yong reported that he was beaten at the *bo-wi-bu* police jail at Maram and was subjected to water torture and hung by his wrists in the *bo-wi-bu* police jail at Moonsu in 1993.
- KIM Tae Jin reported that he was beaten, deprived of sleep, and made to kneel motionless for many hours at the *bo-wi-bu* police detention/interrogation facility in Chongjin in late 1998/early 1999.
- YOU Chun Sik reported that he was kicked, beaten, and subjected to daylong motionless-sitting torture at the *bo-wi-bu* police jail in Sinuiju in 2000. He described the motionless-sitting as being more painful than the beatings.
- Former Detainee #21 reported that she was beaten unconscious in mid-1999 at the *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People’s Safety Agency) *ku-ryu-jang* (detention/interrogation facility) at Onsong, where detainees were beaten so badly that they confessed to doing things they had not done. Women were hit on their fingertips. She witnessed one very ill woman who was compelled to do stand-up/sit-down repetitions until she died.



- Former Detainee #22 reported that he was beaten with chairs at Onsong *bo-wi-bu* (State Security Agency) police jail in late 2001, and beaten even worse at the Chongjin *In-min-bo-an-seong* detention center in early 2002.
- Former Detainee #24 reported that there were beatings at the *bo-wi-bu* police jail in Sinuiju in January 2000.
- Former Detainee #25 reported that one woman, a former schoolteacher who had been caught in Mongolia and repatriated to China and North Korea, was beaten nearly to death at the Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* detention center in November 1999, and then taken away either to die or, if she recovered, for transfer to *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 22.
- Former Detainee #26 was made to kneel motionless at the Onsong *bo-wi-bu* police jail in June 2000 and was made to sit motionless for six days at the Hoeryong *bo-wi-bu* police jail in July 2001.
- Former Detainee #28 reported that prisoners were beaten to death at the *Kyo-hwa-so* No. 12 at Jeonger-ri in North Hamgyong Province in 1999.

## II. Ethnic Infanticide Summary

There are sporadic reports of forced abortions and baby killings at the *kwan-li-so*, where, except for a very few privileged couples, the prisoners were not allowed to have sex or children. There are also sporadic reports of forced abortion and baby killings at the *kwan-li-so*, where sex between prisoners is prohibited. And there are sporadic reports of killings of pregnant women who were raped or coerced into sex by prison guards. However, this report focuses on the forced abortions and baby killings directed against and inflicted on women forcibly repatriated from China, because of the ethnic and policy components of those atrocities.

- CHOI Yong Hwa assisted in the delivery of babies, three of whom were promptly killed, at the Sinuiju *do-jip-kyul-so* (provincial detention center) in mid-2000.
- Former Detainee #8 witnessed six forced abortions at Chongjin *do-jip-kyul-so* in mid-2000.
- Former Detainee #9 witnessed ten forced abortions at Onsong *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* (labor-training camp) in mid-2000.
- YOU Chun Sik reported that four pregnant women at the *bo-wi-bu* (National Security Agency) police station in Sinuiju were subjected to forced abortions in mid-2000.
- Former Detainee #21 reported two baby killings at the Onsong *In-min-bo-an-seong* (People's Safety Agency) police station in late 1999.
- Former Detainee #24 helped deliver seven babies who were killed at the Backtori, South Sinuiju *In-min-bo-an-seong* police detention center in January 2000.
- Former Detainee #25 witnessed four babies killed at Nongpo *In-min-bo-an-seong* police detention center in Chongjin in late 1999, and another six pregnant women subjected to forced abortion.
- Former Detainee #26 witnessed three forced abortions and seven babies killed at the Nongpo *jip-kyul-so* (detention center), Chongjin City, in May 2000.

## PART FOUR

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **To the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

North Korea should proceed to implement, without further delay, the recommendations made to it by the U.N. Human Rights Committee in July 2001 (CCPR/CO/72/PRK) and by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in April 2003 (E/CN.4/2003/L.31/Rev.1) reprinted in the appendices to this report.

#### **To the People's Republic of China**

The People's Republic of China should stop repatriating North Koreans, even if it regards them as illegal immigrants (rather than *refugees sur place*, those individuals who, because of the person's own actions or as a result of circumstances that have developed in the country of origin during the person's absence, cannot safely return to that country).<sup>47</sup> Although it might have been the famine that drove North Koreans into China for food (or to find work to buy food for their families back home), the brutal interrogations, torture, and forced-labor detention systems and the dire punishments for those who are returned makes the refugees "political," until it can be independently verified that North Korean abuse of repatriated Koreans has ceased.

It would be preferable for China to allow the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to North Koreans in China and for China to enable the UNHCR to extend its concern and care to those North Koreans who possess a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to their country of origin. But until China is prepared to take that step, it should simply ignore the North Koreans in northeast China, who are suffering from the food shortage and persecution. These North Koreans' needs can be tended to by humanitarian NGOs, until the food situation in North Korea stabilizes and its human rights situation has substantially improved.

#### **To the Republic of Korea**

South Korea should (continue to) grant asylum to North Korean refugees who reach its embassies and consulates abroad.

South Korea should not exclude human rights matters from its otherwise multifaceted dialogue with North Korea; and should support international efforts to address the human rights situation in North Korea, such as the North Korea resolution at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

#### **To Other Member States of the International Community**

Neighboring and other nation-states face a series of interlocking and unresolved disputes with North Korea. These include extremely serious security issues revolving around North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs, and the conventional military face-off at the DMZ separating North and South Korea. These disputes, inevitably, also involve humanitarian issues, such as North Korea's continuing need for international food aid to keep

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<sup>47</sup> Office of the UNHCR, Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status, para. 94 and 95. (Geneva: United Nations, 1988).

renewed famine at bay, family-reunification visits between North and South Koreans, and accounting for South Korean and Japanese citizens previously kidnapped by North Korea.

If and when negotiations on the problem of North Korea's nuclear proliferation and other security issues should advance toward an agreement, the human rights situation in North Korea should also be addressed, particularly if North Korea would receive significant economic aid as part of the nuclear deal. That is to say, in any approach involving foreign aid and investment, considerable improvement in North Korea's human rights situation should be placed on the agenda.

In any arrangements involving foreign investment in extraction or production enterprises for export to world markets, care must be taken to prohibit the utilization of slave, forced, or prison labor, or the evolution of a situation where free labor from preferred workers is utilized in the export zones while production for domestic distribution and consumption is based on prison and forced labor. Access to foreign markets should be conditioned on respect for all core labor standards, including the prohibition of forced labor, that are established in the International Labor Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

All intergovernmental contact with North Korea should include discussion toward the improvement of human rights conditions, particularly the verified abolition of political prisoner camps and detention centers and the release of those being held. Some repressive practices in North Korea could be ended rather easily. Other aspects may be more complicated. Emptying out the *kwan-li-so* may require, in part, an orderly departure program and some form of third-country resettlement for those whose treatment or condition is such as to preclude re-integration into North Korean society.<sup>48</sup>

***An agreement that provides for economic assistance to North Korea should also mandate the following:***

1. North Korea should decriminalize the right to leave and should release all North Koreans who have been detained upon repatriation from China.
2. North Korea should release all those prisoners held in arbitrary detention in the *kwan-li-so* political penal-labor colonies, and invite the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Imprisonment, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and/or Human Rights Watch to observe the closings through on-site visits to the locations of the former *kwan-li-so* to confirm that these political penal-labor colonies are no longer in operation.

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<sup>48</sup> A recently formed group of former North Korean political prisoners has expressed the fear that increasing exposure of the officially denied *kwan-li-so*, along with increased pressure over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, might lead the regime to "massacre the prisoners" in order to destroy evidence of the camps. These former prisoners have called for increased satellite reconnaissance of these camps. This report supports their appeal for increased and ongoing satellite monitoring of the camps along with the recommendation that any suspect activity be immediately reported to the U.N. Secretary-General, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Presidents of the Security Council and General Assembly. The coordinates for camps pictured in this report are featured in the small maps in the margins of this report.

3. The brutal mistreatment of convicted prisoners in the *kyo-hwa-so* prison-labor facilities must end. The World Food Program (WFP) and humanitarian relief organizations should be invited to supply food aid to the prisons in order to alleviate the problem of virtually constant semi-starvation among prisoners and high levels of deaths in detention from combinations of forced labor and below-subsistence-level food rations.<sup>49</sup>
4. North Korea should initiate a dialogue with the International Labor Organization to bring the “reform-through-labor” in the *kyo-hwa-so* prison-labor facilities, *jip-kyul-so* detention centers, and *ro-dong-dan-ryeon-dae* labor-training camps into conformity with international standards against forced and slave labor.
5. North Korea should invite representatives from the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in order to implement the recommendations to the DPRK from the U.N. Human Rights Committee and U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

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<sup>49</sup> The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) usually takes a dim view of U.N. agencies taking over what are clearly the responsibilities of Member States, such as feeding prisoners in state penal institutions. Nonetheless, to avert starvation and malnutrition-related disease, WFP provides foods to prisons in other countries and could do so in North Korea as well.

# APPENDIX A

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U.N. Commission on Human Rights, Resolution on North Korea  
15 April 2003  
E/CN.4/2003/L.31/Rev.1

## UNITED NATIONS

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# E

**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.  
LIMITED

E/CN.4/2003/L.31/Rev.1  
15 April 2003

Original: ENGLISH

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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-ninth session

Agenda item 9

## QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

*Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria\*, Cyprus\*, Czech Republic\*, Denmark\*, Estonia\*, Finland\*, France, Germany, Greece\*, Hungary\*, Iceland\*, Ireland, Italy\*, Latvia\*, Lithuania\*, Luxembourg\*, Malta\*, Monaco\*, Netherlands\*, Poland, Portugal\*, Romania\*, Slovakia\*, Slovenia\*, Spain\*, Sweden and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: draft resolution*

### 2003/... Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

*The Commission on Human Rights,*

*Reaffirming* that all States Members of the United Nations have the obligation to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and to implement the obligations they have assumed under the various international instruments,

*Mindful* that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

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*Taking note* of the reports submitted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea concerning the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the

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\* In accordance with rule 69, paragraph 3, of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and encourages the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to continue to submit its reports in a timely manner,

*Taking note* also of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee concerning the reports that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has submitted to them,

*Expressing its deep concern* at the precarious humanitarian situation in the country, in particular the prevalence of infant malnutrition which, despite recent progress, still affects a significant percentage of children and their physical and mental development,

*Reaffirming* that it is the responsibility of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of its entire population,

*Underlining* the importance of the effective continuation of the process of rapprochement between the two Koreas and noting the recent progress in this respect,

*Desiring* to promote a constructive approach leading to concrete progress in the field of human rights,

1. *Expresses its deep concern* about reports of systemic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including:
  - (a) Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, public executions, imposition of the death penalty for political reasons, the existence of a large number of prison camps and the extensive use of forced labour, and lack of respect for the rights of persons deprived of their liberty;
  - (b) All-pervasive and severe restrictions on the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association and on access of everyone to information, and limitations imposed on every person who wishes to move freely within the country and travel abroad;
  - (c) The mistreatment of and discrimination against disabled children whose particular needs are not sufficiently taken into consideration, while at the same time welcoming, in this regard, reports of the preparation of a law on physically disabled persons;
  - (d) Continued violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women;
2. *Notes with regret* that the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have not created the necessary conditions to permit the international community to verify these reports in an independent manner and calls upon the Government to respond to these reports and these concerns urgently, including:
  - (a) By ratifying human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party, in particular the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and by implementing its obligations under the human rights instruments to which it is a party, namely the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in particular concerning the right of everyone to be free from hunger, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring that all necessary measures are undertaken to this end;
  - (b) By providing all pertinent information concerning the above-mentioned issues;
  - (c) By implementing the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee;

- (d) By refraining from sanctioning citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who have moved to other countries, in particular for humanitarian reasons, and refraining from treating their departure as treason leading to punishments of internment, inhuman or degrading treatment or the death penalty;
  - (e) By cooperating with the United Nations system in the field of human rights and cooperating without restriction with the thematic procedures of the Commission on Human Rights relevant to the situation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in particular the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, the Special Rapporteur on torture, the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, and international human rights organizations;
  - (f) By resolving, clearly and transparently, all the unresolved questions relating to the abduction of foreigners;
  - (g) By adhering to internationally recognized labour standards;
3. *Is also deeply concerned* about reports of a precarious humanitarian situation;
  4. *Calls upon* the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to ensure that humanitarian organizations, in particular the United Nations agencies, have free and unimpeded access to all parts of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in order for them to ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered impartially on the basis of need, in accordance with humanitarian principles;
  5. *Requests* the international community to continue to urge the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to ensure that humanitarian assistance, especially food aid, destined for the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is distributed in accordance with humanitarian principles and that representatives of international humanitarian actors are allowed to travel throughout the country to monitor this distribution, and to ensure the respect for the fundamental principles of asylum;
  6. *Requests* the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to engage in a comprehensive dialogue with the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with a view to establishing technical cooperation programmes in the field of human rights and to submit his findings and recommendations to the Commission at its sixtieth session;
  7. *Decides* to continue its consideration of this question at its sixtieth session under the same agenda item as a matter of high priority.

## APPENDIX B

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Concluding Observations of the U.N. Human Rights Committee:  
Democratic People's Republic of Korea  
27 July 2001  
CCPR/CO/72/PRK

UNITED NATIONS

CCPR

International Covenant  
on Civil and  
Political Rights

Distr.

GENERAL  
CCPR/CO/72/PRK  
27 August 2001

Original: ENGLISH

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### Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee : Democratic People's Republic of Korea. 27/08/2001. CCPR/CO/72/PRK. (Concluding Observations/Comments)

Convention Abbreviation: CCPR  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE  
Seventy-second session

#### CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 40 OF THE COVENANT

Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee  
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

1. The Committee considered the second periodic report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (CCPR/C/PRK/2000/2) at its 1944th to 1946th meetings, held on 19 and 20 July 2001, and adopted the following concluding observations at its 1953rd meeting, held on 26 July 2001.

##### A. Introduction

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the second periodic report, which contains detailed information on domestic legislation in the area of civil and political rights, and the opportunity to resume the dialogue with the State party after an interval of more than 17 years. The Committee welcomes the State party's decision to send a strong delegation from its capital, composed of representatives of various government authorities, for the examination of the second periodic report, and the readiness expressed by the delegation to continue the dialogue with the Committee after the examination of the report. The Committee is also pleased to note that the delegation of the State party recognized the importance of the Committee's task and intimated that the Committee could



expect more prompt reporting in the future. The Committee regrets, however, the considerable delay in the submission of the report, which was due in 1987. It regrets the lack of information on the human rights situation in practice, as well as the absence of facts and data on the implementation of the Covenant. As a result, a number of credible and substantiated allegations of violations of Covenant provisions which have been brought to the attention of the Committee could not be addressed effectively and the Committee found it difficult to determine whether individuals in the State party's territory and subject to its jurisdiction fully and effectively enjoy their fundamental rights under the Covenant.

#### B. Positive aspects

3. The Committee appreciates the efforts undertaken by the State party to translate and make available texts of domestic legislation relevant to the examination of the second periodic report, which greatly facilitated the Committee's work.

4. The Committee welcomes the reduction of the number of criminal offences carrying the death penalty from 33 to 5, as well as the readiness, mentioned in the report and confirmed by the delegation, further to review the issue of capital punishment with a view to its abolition.

5. The Committee appreciates that the delegation acknowledged the need to improve the condition of human rights in several areas covered by the Covenant, notably the situation of women in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; in that context, the Committee welcomes the ratification by the State party, in February 2001, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

6. The Committee welcomes as a positive sign the fact that exchange visits between families from the State party and the Republic of Korea, however limited, have taken place on three occasions since the Pyongyang Declaration of 15 June 2000.

7. The Committee also appreciates the discontinuation of administrative internment in the State party.

#### C. Subjects of concern and recommendations

8. The Committee remains concerned about constitutional and legislative provisions that seriously endanger the impartiality and independence of the judiciary, notably that the Central Court is accountable to the Supreme People's Assembly under article 162 of the Constitution. Furthermore, article 154 of the Constitution limits the tenure of judges to five years and article 129 of the Criminal Code subjects judges to criminal liability for handing down "unjust judgements". Given the roles assigned to the judiciary under articles 2 and 14, paragraph 1, of the Covenant, these legal provisions have an adverse impact on the protection of human rights guaranteed under the Covenant and endanger the independence of the judiciary required by article 14.1 of the Covenant.

The State party should take appropriate measures to ensure and protect the independence and impartiality of the judiciary at all levels.

9. The Committee has noted uncertainty about the status of the Covenant in the State party's internal legal framework. It notes that, pursuant to article 17 of the Treaty Law of December 1998, the Covenant has the same status as domestic law. However, doubts remain as to whether the Covenant would have primacy over domestic law if the latter

is in conflict with Covenant provisions. The State party is requested to provide information, in its next periodic report to the Committee, about the situation that would prevail in the event of a conflict between the Covenant and domestic law, including the Constitution. The Committee wishes to receive from the State party more precise information about the number of cases in which the Covenant has been in fact invoked before the domestic courts, and with what result.

10. The Committee is concerned that, in addition to judicial protection, there is no independent national institution for the promotion and protection of human rights. It considers that article 69 of the Constitution and the Law on Complaint and Petition granting every citizen the right to submit complaints about the encroachment of his or her rights is no substitute for such an independent monitoring body.

The State party should consider the establishment of a national human rights institution (art. 2 of the Covenant).

11. The Committee is further concerned about the limited number of human rights organizations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the limited access to the State party's territory that is accorded to human rights organizations, as reflected in the small number of international human rights non-governmental organizations that have been granted permission to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea over the past decade.

The State party should grant access to its territory to international human rights organizations and other international bodies on a regular basis at their request and ensure accessibility to indispensable information about the promotion and protection of human rights.

12. Given the State party's obligation, under article 6 of the Covenant, to protect the life of its citizens and to take measures to reduce infant mortality and increase life expectancy, the Committee remains seriously concerned about the lack of measures by the State party to deal with the food and nutrition situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the lack of measures to address, in cooperation with the international community, the causes and consequences of the drought and other natural disasters which seriously affected the country's population in the 1990s.

The Committee recalls paragraph 5 of its General Comment No. 6 on article 6 of the Covenant, adopted at its sixth session, which recommends that States parties "take all possible measures to reduce infant mortality and increase life expectancy, especially in adopting measures to eliminate malnutrition". The State party should provide the Committee with supplementary information on this issue.

13. The Committee takes note of the delegation's information that the death penalty has rarely been imposed and carried out in the past three years. While the Committee appreciates that the number of offences carrying the death penalty has been reduced to five, it remains seriously concerned that, of those five offences, as the report states, four are essentially political offences (arts. 44, 45, 47 and 52 of the Criminal Code), couched in terms so broad that the imposition of the death penalty may be subject to essentially subjective criteria, and not be confined to "the most serious crimes" only, as required under article 6, paragraph 2, of the Covenant. The Committee is also concerned at acknowledged and reported instances of public executions.

The State party should review and amend the above-mentioned articles of the Criminal Code to bring them into conformity with the requirements of article 6, paragraph 2, of the Covenant. The State party should refrain from any public executions. It is invited to work towards the declared goal of abolishing capital punishment.

14. The Committee considers that article 10 of the Criminal Code, under which punishment for an offence not provided for in the Code will be imposed in accordance with those provisions of the Code punishing offences similar in nature and gravity, is incompatible with the concept of “*nullum crimen sine lege*”, enshrined in article 15 of the Covenant.

The State party should repeal article 10 of the Criminal Code.

15. The Committee is deeply concerned about consistent and substantiated allegations of violations, by law enforcement personnel, of article 7 of the Covenant, to which the delegation has not sufficiently responded. The information given by the delegation about the small number of complaints of ill-treatment in custody or detention (six complaints between 1998 and 2000) is difficult to accept as a reflection of the actual situation, in the light of the material available to the Committee, which suggests that the number of instances of ill-treatment and torture is significantly higher.

The State party should ensure that all instances of ill-treatment and of torture and other abuses committed by agents of the State are promptly considered and investigated by an independent body. The State party should institute a system of independent oversight of all places of detention and custody with a view to preventing any act of abuse of power by law enforcement personnel.

16. The Committee takes note of the information provided by the delegation on the conditions of detention in prisons of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The Committee nonetheless remains concerned about the many allegations of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and conditions and of inadequate medical care in reform institutions, prisons and prison camps, which appear to be in violation of articles 7 and 10 of the Covenant and of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

The State party should take steps to improve conditions in the facilities referred to above and all other facilities for detention in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. It must ensure that all persons deprived of their liberty are treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, as required by article 10 of the Covenant. The State party must ensure that sufficient food and appropriate and timely medical care are available to all detainees. The Committee strongly recommends that the State party allow for independent internal and international inspection of prisons, reform institutions and other places of detention or imprisonment.

17. Notwithstanding the explanations given by the delegation, the Committee continues to harbour serious doubts about the compatibility of the provisions of Chapter Two of the Labour Law of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, especially articles 14 and 18 thereof, with the prohibition of forced labour contained in article 8, paragraph 3 (a), of the Covenant.

The State party should amend the above-mentioned provisions of the Labour Law so as to avoid any potential conflict with the provisions of article 8 of the Covenant.

18. While noting the delegation's explanations about the nature and purpose of pre-trial detention and about preliminary investigations tending to prolong the duration of pre-trial detention (see paragraph 65 of the report) , the Committee remains concerned about the compatibility of the State party's pre-trial detention practices and preliminary investigation procedures with article 9 of the Covenant. The duration of detention before a person is brought before a judge is manifestly incompatible with article 9, paragraph 3, of the Covenant.

The State party's next report should contain statistics on the number of persons held in pre-trial detention and on the duration of and reasons for such detention. The State party must ensure that anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge is brought promptly before a judge. The State party must ensure that all of its practices are consistent with the provisions of article 9 of the Covenant and that detainees have access to counsel and are permitted to contact their families from the moment of apprehension.

19. The Committee has noted the State party's justification of the "traveller's certificate" which citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are required to obtain for travel within the country, but considers that such restrictions on domestic travel raise serious questions about their compatibility with article 12, paragraph 1, of the Covenant.

The State party should consider the elimination of the requirement of traveller's certificates.

20. In the Committee's opinion, the requirement, under the Immigration Law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, of administrative permission to travel abroad, and the requirement, for foreigners in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to obtain exit visas to leave the country, are incompatible with the provisions of article 12, paragraph 2, of the Covenant.

The State party should eliminate the requirement of administrative permission and an exit visa as a general rule and require them only in individual cases that can be justified in the light of the Covenant.

21. While noting that the expulsion of aliens is exercised "with great prudence" (para. 82 of the report), the Committee regrets that there is no law, or formal procedure, governing the expulsion of aliens from the territory of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Before expelling an alien, the State party should provide him or her with sufficient safeguards and an effective remedy, in conformity with article 13 of the Covenant. The State party is urged to consider the adoption of legislation governing the expulsion of aliens, which should be consistent with the principle of non-refoulement.

22. The Committee notes with regret that the delegation was unable to provide up-to-date information about religious freedoms in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. As only 40,000 citizens of the country (i.e., less than 0.2 per cent of the population), grouped into four religious communities, are said to be "believers", and in the light of information available to the Committee that religious practice is repressed or strongly discouraged in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Committee is seriously concerned that the State party's practice in this respect does not meet the requirements of article 18 of the Covenant.

The State party is requested to provide the Committee with up-to-date information about the number of citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea belonging to religious communities and the number of places of worship, as well as the practical measures taken by the authorities to guarantee the freedom of exercise of religious practice by the communities mentioned in paragraph 112 of the report.

23. The Committee is concerned that various provisions of the Press Law, and their frequent invocation, are difficult to reconcile with the provisions of article 19 of the Covenant. The Committee is concerned that the notion of "threat to the State security" may be used in such ways as to restrict freedom of expression. Also, the Committee is concerned that the permanent presence in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of foreign media representatives is confined to journalists from three countries, and foreign newspapers and publications are not readily available to the public at large. Moreover, Democratic People's Republic of Korea journalists may not travel abroad freely.

The State party should specify the reasons that have led to the prohibition of certain publications and should refrain from measures that restrict the availability of foreign newspapers to the public. The State party is requested to relax restrictions on the travel abroad by Democratic People's Republic of Korea journalists and to avoid any use of the notion of "threat to the State security" that would repress freedom of expression, contrary to article 19.

24. The Committee has noted the delegation's statement that freedom of assembly is fully respected in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Committee remains concerned, however, about restrictions on public meetings and demonstrations, including possible abuse of the requirements of the laws governing assembly.

The Committee requests the State party to provide additional information on the conditions for public assemblies and, in particular, to indicate whether and under what conditions the holding of a public assembly can be prevented and whether such a measure can be appealed.

25. The provisions of article 25 include the right of every citizen of a State party to have the right and the opportunity, without the restrictions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives (art. 25 (a)), and to vote or be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the wish of the electors. The Committee has taken note of the delegation's explanation that, as there has been no popular manifestation of any desire to create new political parties, no regulation or legislation governing the creation and registration of political parties is currently envisaged. The Committee considers that this situation runs counter to the provisions of article 25 of the Covenant, as it may adversely affect the rights of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs through freely chosen representatives, as required by article 25.

The State party should refer to the Committee's General Comment 25 on article 25, adopted at its fifty-seventh session, as guidance in respect of the above issues, with a view to ensuring full compliance with the provisions of article 25.

26. While noting the delegation's statement that trafficking of women does not exist in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Committee remains seriously concerned at the number of substantiated allegations about trafficking of women, in violation of article 8 of the Covenant, brought to its attention by non-governmental and other

sources, including the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women of the Commission on Human Rights.

The State party should investigate the above allegations further, in a spirit of cooperation, and report its findings to the Committee.

27. The Committee notes with concern the low level of representation of women at the more senior levels of the public sector, as well as the absence of any precise data on the representation of women in other sectors of the economy, including their level of responsibility.

The State party is requested to take measures to implement articles 3 and 26 of the Covenant by improving women's participation in the public sector workforce, especially in senior positions, and to provide the Committee with statistical data on the status of women, in particular as to the level of their responsibility and remuneration in the major economic sectors.

28. The State party should ensure that its second periodic report, and the present concluding observations, are disseminated widely.

29. The State party should indicate within one year, in accordance with rule 70, paragraph 5, of the Committee's rules of procedure, the measures it has taken or envisages to give effect to the Committee's recommendations contained in paragraphs 15, 22, 23, 24 and 26 of the present concluding observations.

30. The Committee requests that the information relating to its other recommendations and to the Covenant as a whole should be included in the third periodic report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to be submitted by 1 January 2004.

## APPENDIX C

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### **International Labor Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work**

International Labor Organization  
Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

#### **ILO - Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Declaration : Text Of Declaration**

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ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work  
86th Session, Geneva, June 1998

Whereas the ILO was founded in the conviction that social justice is essential to universal and lasting peace;

Whereas economic growth is essential but not sufficient to ensure equity, social progress and the eradication of poverty, confirming the need for the ILO to promote strong social policies, justice and democratic institutions;

Whereas the ILO should, now more than ever, draw upon all its standard-setting, technical cooperation and research resources in all its areas of competence, in particular employment, vocational training and working conditions, to ensure that, in the context of a global strategy for economic and social development, economic and social policies are mutually reinforcing components in order to create broad-based sustainable development;

Whereas the ILO should give special attention to the problems of persons with special social needs, particularly the unemployed and migrant workers, and mobilize and encourage international, regional and national efforts aimed at resolving their problems, and promote effective policies aimed at job creation;

Whereas, in seeking to maintain the link between social progress and economic growth, the guarantee of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is of particular significance in that it enables the persons concerned, to claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity, their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate, and to achieve fully their human potential;

Whereas the ILO is the constitutionally mandated international organization and the competent body to set and deal with international labour standards, and enjoys universal support and acknowledgement in promoting Fundamental Rights at Work as the expression of its constitutional principles;

Whereas it is urgent, in a situation of growing economic interdependence, to reaffirm the immutable nature of the Fundamental Principles and Rights embodied in the Constitution of the Organization and to promote their universal application;

## The International Labour Conference

1. Recalls:
  - (a) that in freely joining the ILO, all Members have endorsed the principles and rights set out in its Constitution and in the Declaration of Philadelphia, and have undertaken to work towards attaining the overall objectives of the Organization to the best of their resources and fully in line with their specific circumstances;
  - (b) that these principles and rights have been expressed and developed in the form of specific rights and obligations in Conventions recognized as fundamental both inside and outside the Organization.
2. Declares that all Members, even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions, namely:
  - (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
  - (b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
  - (c) the effective abolition of child labour; and
  - (d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
3. Recognizes the obligation on the Organization to assist its Members, in response to their established and expressed needs, in order to attain these objectives by making full use of its constitutional, operational and budgetary resources, including, by the mobilization of external resources and support, as well as by encouraging other international organizations with which the ILO has established relations, pursuant to article 12 of its Constitution, to support these efforts:
  - (a) by offering technical cooperation and advisory services to promote the ratification and implementation of the fundamental Conventions;
  - (b) by assisting those Members not yet in a position to ratify some or all of these Conventions in their efforts to respect, to promote and to realize the principles concerning fundamental rights which are the subject of these Conventions; and
  - (c) by helping the Members in their efforts to create a climate for economic and social development.
4. Decides that, to give full effect to this Declaration, a promotional follow-up, which is meaningful and effective, shall be implemented in accordance with the measures specified in the annex hereto, which shall be considered as an integral part of this Declaration.
5. Stresses that labour standards should not be used for protectionist trade purposes, and that nothing in this Declaration and its follow-up shall be invoked or otherwise used for such purposes; in addition, the comparative advantage of any country should in no way be called into question by this Declaration and its follow-up.



# Satellite Imagery of the North Korean Gulag

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Matthew McKinzie, *Natural Resources Defense Council*

The U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) recently obtained high-resolution, commercial satellite images of seven North Korean prisons and prison camps. These photographs date from the time period 2001 to 2003, and were obtained from the archives of the DigitalGlobe and Space Imaging corporations. DigitalGlobe donated their satellite imagery to the Committee, and NRDC produced the maps in this section of the report.

Commercial, high-resolution satellite imagery has only been publicly available as a research tool since late 1999, with the launch of the Denver-based Space Imaging Corporation's Ikonos satellite. The Ikonos satellite currently orbits the earth every 98 minutes at an altitude of 423 miles. Ikonos satellite images are typically photographed in strips 11 kilometers wide and with a resolution of one meter. Denver-based DigitalGlobe's QuickBird satellite was launched in 2001, and can achieve a remarkable resolution of 61 centimeters.

With meter and sub-meter resolution satellite imagery, objects such as buildings, forests, orchards, fields, fences, rivers, railways, trails, and roads are easily recognizable. Indeed, these photographs were shown to former North Koreans who were imprisoned in these places, and who were able to identify specific features in the photographs and to describe their purposes. Using the satellite imagery, interviews with former prisoners were conducted in Seoul, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, and the derived annotations have been overlaid on the photographs reproduced in this section of the report.

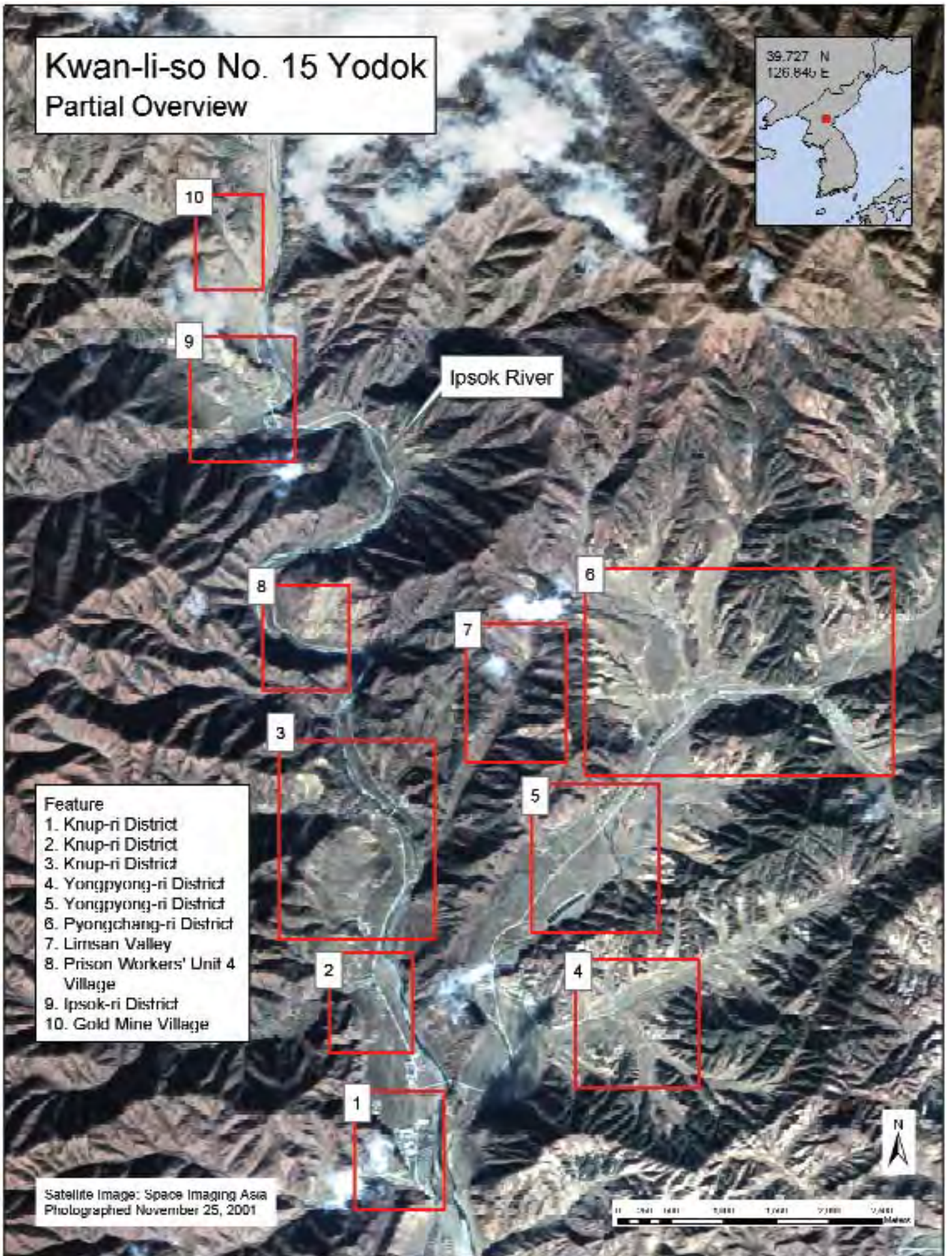
Commercial, high-resolution satellite imagery, and the testimony of North Korean defectors who were exposed to the gulag, are revealing windows into this closed society. Annotated satellite images of five sites in the North Korean gulag offers a glimpse into the different sorts of work that prisoners are forced to perform. Activities at *Kwan-li-so* No. 15 "Yodok," for example, are largely concerned with food production. *Kwan-li-so* Nos. 14, 18, and 22 are mining camps. These sites are very large, consisting of several villages spread over more than a hundred square kilometers. The smaller sites — Kaechon, Nongpo and Sinuiju — have factories or workshops where prison laborers are forced to produce bricks, clothing, shoes, or other goods.

The satellite images presented in this report represent a fraction of the photographs of North Korea now in the archives of DigitalGlobe and Space Imaging. In the coming years, this tool will be used to understand and expose the human rights and humanitarian situation in this still-closed society, formerly known as the "Hermit Kingdom."

# Selected North Korean Prison Camp Locations



# Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok Partial Overview



# Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok Knup-ri District



- FEATURE
- 1. Confinement Cell
  - 2. Threshing House
  - 3. School for Guards' Children
  - 4. Headquarter Office of Guards
  - 5. SSPA Building
  - 6. Limestone Mine
  - 7. SSPA Guards' Houses

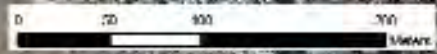


Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



0 50 100 200  
Meters

# Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok Knup-ri District



## FEATURE

- 1. Threshing House
- 2. Prison Workers' Unit 2 Village
- 3. Prison Workers' Unit 1 Village
- 4. SSPA Guards' Office
- 5. Threshing House
- 6. Public Execution Site
- 7. Unit 2 Workplace
- 8. Research Center for Revolutionary History of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001

# Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok Knup-ri District



- FEATURE**
- 1. Donsa Valley
  - 2. Honey-Gathering Place
  - 3. Where Kang Chol Hwan's Family Lived
  - 4. SSPA Office
  - 5. Workplace
  - 6. Singles' Dorm
  - 7. Burial Site for Dead Bodies
  - 8. Unit 3 Bridge
  - 9. Threshing House
  - 10. Prison Workers' Unit 8 Village
  - 11. Flour Mill
  - 12. Pig-Breeding Farm

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Yongpyong-ri District



1

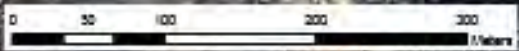
- FEATURE
- 1. Orchards
  - 2. Orchards
  - 3. Mine for Clay Mixed with Soil Stones

3

2



Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Yongpyong-ri District

FEATURE  
1. Fish Farm  
2. Threshing House

2

1



Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001





**Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Pyongchang-ri District**



Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Limsan Valley

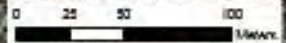


2

FEATURE  
1. Limsan Valley  
2. Pasture for Goats and Lambs

1

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Prison Workers' Unit 4 Village



Prison Workers' Unit 4 Village

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok  
Ipsok-ri District



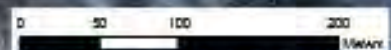
3

2

1

- FEATURE
- 1. Threshing House
  - 2. Ipsok-ri Village
  - 3. Opium Poppy Farm

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



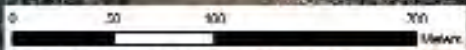
# Kwan-li-so No. 15 Yodok Gold Mine Village



1

FEATURE  
1. Sosu Valley  
2. Gold Mine Village

2



Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed November 25, 2001



**Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaechon  
Partial Overview**

**Taedong River**

**4th and 5th Divisions,  
Kwan-li-so No. 18,**

**6th Division,  
Kwan-li-so No. 18**

**Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang  
Partial Overview**

Satellite Image: Spasat Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003

# Kwan-li-so Number 18 Bukchang 6th Division



- FEATURE**
- 1. Pig Farm
  - 2. Han Ryong Gang Mine Entrance
  - 3. Food Distribution for Camp Management
  - 4. Kim Yong's House for 3 Years (96-99)
  - 5. Bo-wi-bu Police Building
  - 6. The "Respect for Elders" Furniture Factory
  - 7. Hospital
  - 8. Farm Managers' Housing
  - 9. Prisoner Housing

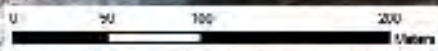


Satellite Image. Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003

# Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang 6th Division



- FEATURE
- 1. Prisoner Housing (Families)
  - 2. Single Prisoners' Dorm
  - 3. Coal Trolley Repair Shop (Kim Yong's Work Site)
  - 4. Carbonite Supply House
  - 5. Mine Tunnel Entrance
  - 6. Highest Official's Office
  - 7. Mine Cable Head
  - 8. Workers' Bath Site
  - 9. Restaurant for High Officials
  - 10. Bo-wi-bu Office
  - 11. Railroad Loading Yard



Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



**Kwan-li-so Number 18 Bukchang  
6th Division**

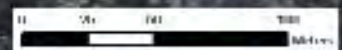


**FEATURE**  
1. Han Jae Gang Mine Entrance  
2. Dynamite Warehouse

2

1

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



# Kwan-li-so Number 18 Bukchang 4th and 5th Divisions



- FEATURE**
- 1. Factory for Farming and Mining Tools
  - 2. Cement Factory
  - 3. Self Criticism at Night and Hard Labor Punishment
  - 4. Kwan-li-so No. 18 Branch Office
  - 5. Guards' Canteen
  - 6. Security Department
  - 7. Area for Cabbage Formulation
  - 8. Guards' Family Housing
  - 9. Soy Sauce Factory
  - 10. Hospital for Accident Victims
  - 11. Prisoner Housing
  - 12. Prisoner Housing

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



# Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang 4th and 5th Divisions



## FEATURE

1. Housing for Former Ranking Officials  
Currently Sentenced for Three Years Imprisonment for Disloyalty
2. Bong Chang Gang Mine Entrance Tunnel
3. Bob Bul Gang (Tiger Creek) Mine Entrance
4. Prisoner Housing
5. Prisoner Housing

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



# Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang Periphery



# Kwan-li-so No. 18 Bukchang Periphery



2

1

- FEATURE
- 1. Distillery
  - 2. Former House of Kim Byung Hwa (Former Director of Bo-wi-bo (National Security Agency Police), Now a Guest House for VIPs)

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



**Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaecheon and  
No. 18 Bukchang**



1

6

5

7

**Kwan-li-so No. 18  
Bukchang**

**Kwan-li-so No. 14  
Kaecheon**

- FEATURE**
- 1. Mujin I Coal Mine Entrance
  - 2. Prisoner Housing
  - 3. Execution Site
  - 4. Rifle Range
  - 5. Hospice for Dying Prisoners
  - 6. Guard Facilities
  - 7. Guard Facilities

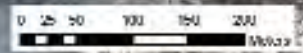
Taedong River

2

3

4

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003



# Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaechon Headquarters



2

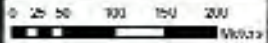
3

1

- FEATURE**
- 1. Prisoner Housing
  - 2. Pu-rok Mountain
  - 3. Mujin Il Coal Mine Entrance  
(Where Kim Yong Mined while  
Imprisoned at Camp No. 14)
  - 4. Bo-wi-bu No. 14 Headquarters

4

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003

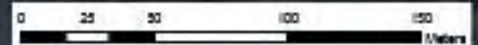


Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaecheon  
Prisoner Housing



Prisoner Housing

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003







**Kwan-li-so No. 14 Kaecheon  
Prisoner Housing**

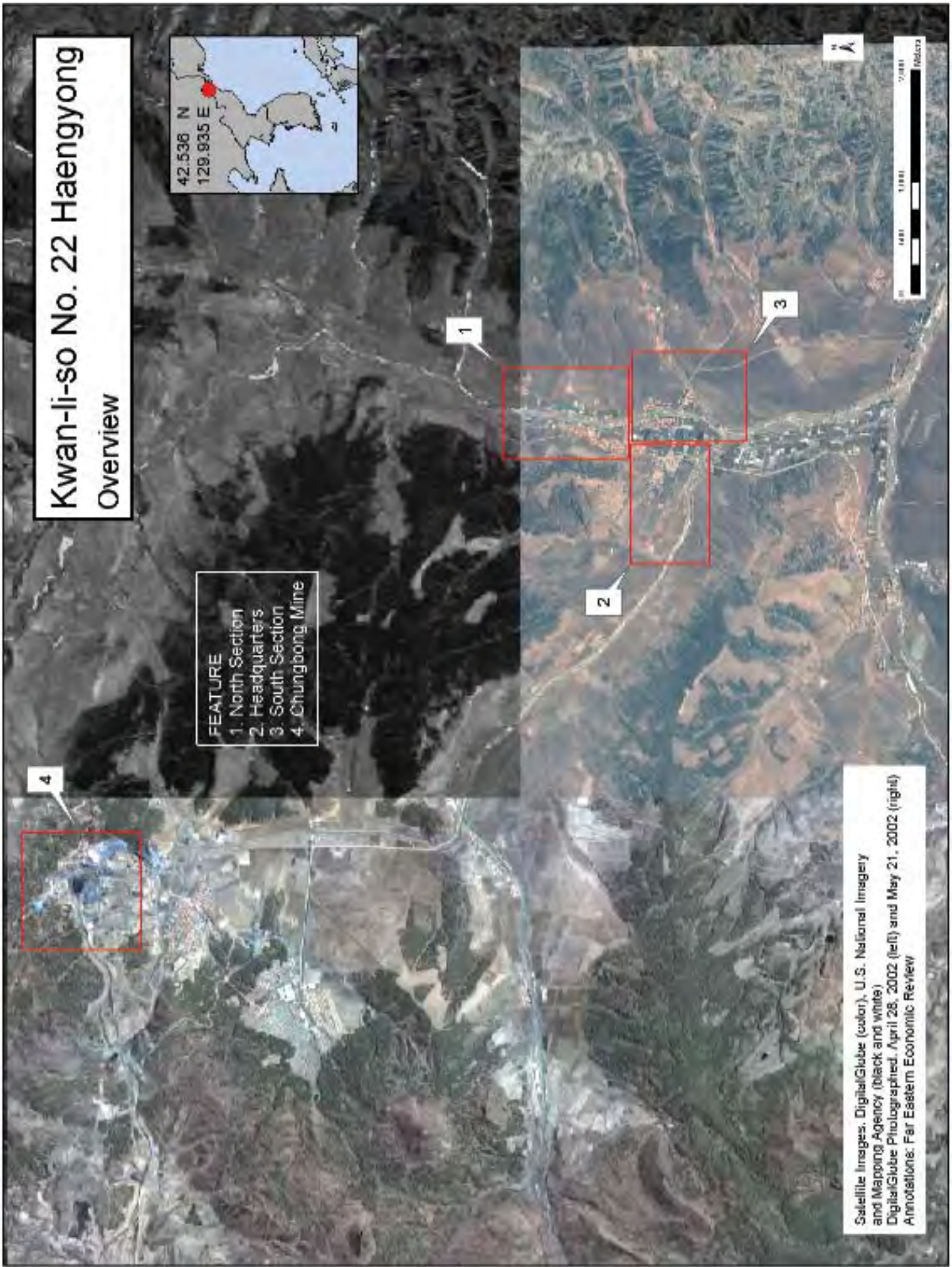
Prisoner  
Housing

Prisoner  
Housing

Prisoner  
Housing

Satellite Image: Space Imaging Asia  
Photographed January 8, 2003

0 25 50 100 150 200  
Meters



# Kwan-li-so No. 22 Haengyong North Section

## FEATURE

1. Quarters for Prisoners with Families
2. Threshing House
3. Quarters for Prisoners with Families
4. Vegetable and Freight Depot
5. Furniture Factory
6. Quarters for Prisoners with Families



Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
Photographed May 21, 2002  
Annotations: Far Eastern Economic Review

# Kwan-li-so No. 22 Haengyong South Section



Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
Photographed May 21, 2002  
Annotations: Far Eastern Economic Review

- FEATURE
- 1. Transport Depot
  - 2. Food Factory
  - 3. Pharmaceutical Factory
  - 4. Slaughterhouse
  - 5. Emergency Food Stores



**Kwan-li-so No. 22 Haengyong  
Headquarters**

- FEATURE**
- 1. Kim Il Sung Memorial Hall
  - 2. Theater
  - 3. Weapons Store
  - 4. Family Quarters for Prisoners
  - 5. Propaganda Bureau
  - 6. Supplies Depot
  - 7. Guards' Quarters
  - 8. Pilgrimage
  - 9. Greenhouses
  - 10. Betenim and Torture Center
  - 11. Armory
  - 12. Administration Offices
  - 13. Guards' Restroom
  - 14. Guards' Night Duty Room
  - 15. Office of Camp Director
  - 16. Camouflaged Anti-aircraft Guns
  - 17. Quarters for Prisoners with Families
  - 18. Threshing House

Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
 Photographed May 21, 2002  
 Annotations: Far Eastern Economic Review



**Kwan-li-so No. 22 Haengyong  
Chungbong Mine**

- FEATURE**
- 1. Railway Station
  - 2. Pithead
  - 3. Security Bureau
  - 4. Equipment Repair Shops
  - 5. Single Prisoners' Quarters
  - 6. Lumber Yard
  - 7. Assembly Area
  - 8. Meeting Hall
  - 9. Explosives Depot
  - 10. Coal-Loading Depot

Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
 Photographed April 28, 2002  
 Annotations: Far Eastern Economic Review



**Kyo-hwa-so No. 1 Kaecheon**  
**Overview**

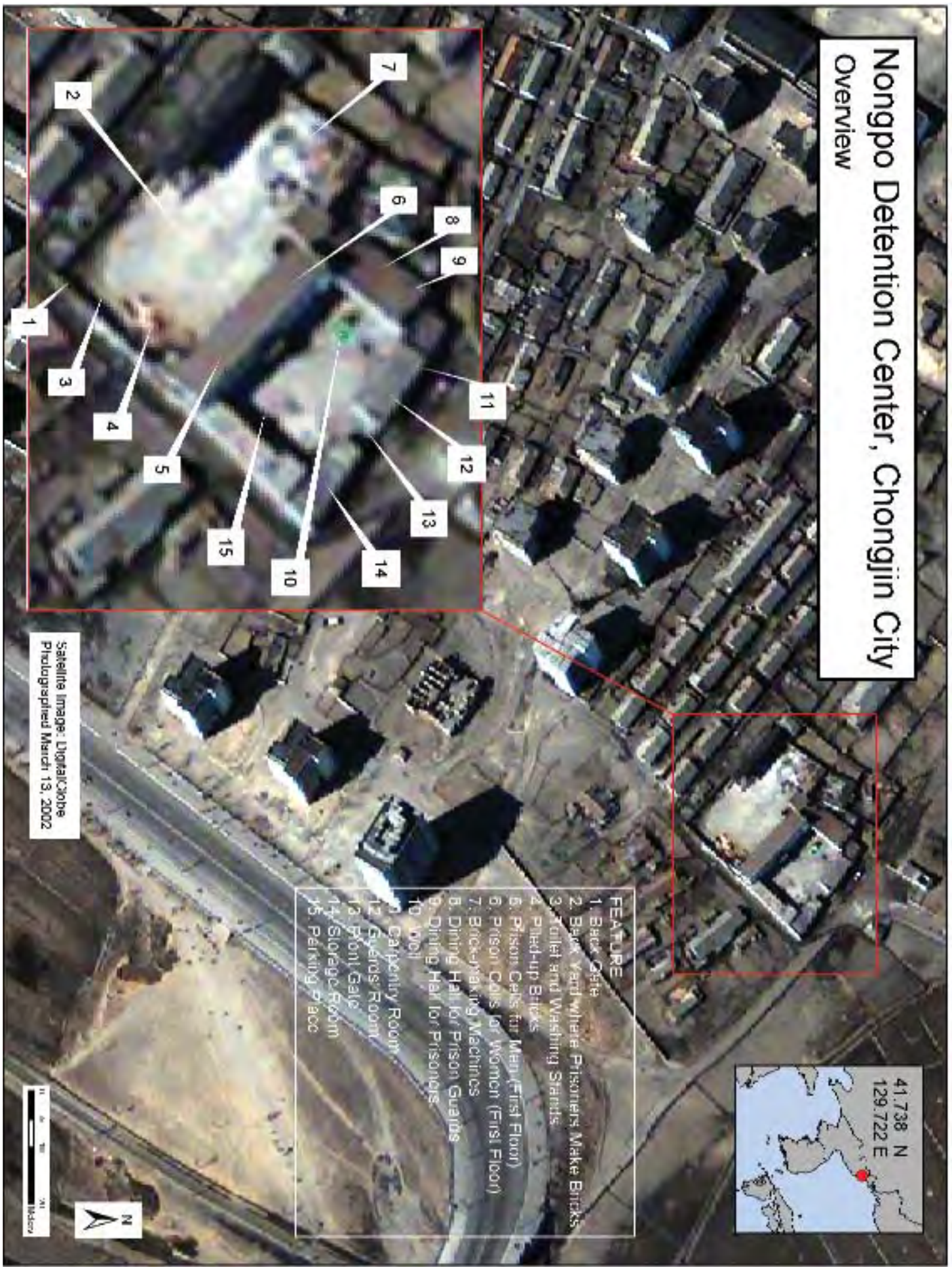
- FEATURE**
- 1. Perimeter Wall
  - 2. 3-Story Dormitory for Prisoners
  - 3. Supply Rooms Area
  - 4. Leather and Rubber Workshops
  - 5. Entry Gate
  - 6. Shoe-making Units 1 and 2
  - 7. Designing Unit
  - 8. Culling Unit
  - 9. Repair Shop/Garage
  - 10. Guard Towers
  - 11. Guard Towers
  - 12. Guard Towers

Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
 Photographed December 10, 2002





# Nongpo Detention Center, Chongjin City Overview



- FEATURE**
1. Back Gate
  2. Back Yard where Prisoners Make Bricks
  3. Toilet and Washing Stands
  4. Piled-up Bricks
  5. Prison Cells for Men (First Floor)
  6. Prison Cells for Women (First Floor)
  7. Brick-making Machines
  8. Dining Hall for Prison Guards
  9. Dining Hall for Prisoners
  10. Well
  11. Carpenter Room
  12. Guards Room
  13. Front Gate
  14. Storage Room
  15. Petting Place

Satellite Image: DigitalGlobe  
Photographied March 13, 2002



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