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 Trafficking of North Korean Refugees in China

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Combating Human Trafficking in Asia: A Strategy for Action

Asia Society
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North Korean Refugees/Migrants in China

- Estimated 200,000 North Koreans in China
- They leave North Korea by crossing the Tumen River
North Korean Refugees/Migrants in China

- To search for food or resources

Images from North Korea Holocaust Exhibit, November 2004
North Korean Refugees/Defectors in China

- To flee detention camps or prisons
- To flee political or religious persecution
Chinese Police Forcibly Repatriate Refugees

- In support of North Korean regime
- In violation of UN treaty on treatment of refugees
- Special units to hunt down refugees
- Bounties are paid for turning in refugees

65 Refugees, 2 Rescue Workers Seized in China

October 26, 2004

Chinese government raided two NK refugee hide-out places in the Tong Chow section of Beijing on October 26th, and arrested (65) NK refugees who were waiting to be rescued and (2) SK human rights workers. Among them were (11) teenage children and (1) senior man aged over 70. Thirty policemen came and arrested the refugees who did not even resist.
Chinese Police Forcibly Repatriate Refugees
Refugees Returned to North Korea

- Returning North Koreans are beaten, imprisoned, tortured, or...
Refugees Returned to North Korea

• executed

March 1, 2005, Yusunnodong District in Huireong, North Hamkyoung Province, North Korea
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

- Majority are women and teens
- Many are abducted and sold
  - Informal wives or concubines
    - China’s one child policy resulted in deficit of young women
  - Karaoke clubs for prostitution
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

- Women and teen girls are raped by kidnappers, buyers and sellers
- Once recognized as North Koreans, they are powerless
- Any protest or lack of obedience results in being resold or turned over to the Chinese police for repatriation
North Korean Refugees in Northeast China

• Hide in the mountains in dugouts or small shelters
North Korean Women in China

- Korean Chinese men hunt for women and girls in the forests and mountains
- Rape them and force them to “marry”
- Sell them to club owners
- 80 to 90% of women refugees are trafficked — leader of the Underground Railroad
- Chinese police are corrupt and collaborate with traffickers

“Women are treated like animals. They have no rights. Whoever finds them first can sleep with them. Then he sells them later.” — Chun Ki-won
Trafficking of North Korean Women

- Women and teen girls are trafficked from North Korea to China by traffickers
- Many reports of women and teen girls “selling themselves” to men in China to survive
- March 1999 – 26 year old in detention was executed for “selling herself” in China
  - She “fell under the influence of capitalism and sold herself for money.”
  - Executed in public as a lesson to others
Strategy for Action

• Statement of Principles – by American religious, human rights, security, social, and civil leaders
• Aim: To put pressure on China to stop violating the treatment of refugees according to international law
• China urged to:
  – Halt all efforts to forcibly return NKs in violation of international human rights and refugee protection obligations
  – Grant international humanitarian organizations, NGOs, access to border areas
  – Ensure no public official is complicit in the trafficking of NK women
Strategy for Action

- Grant all NKs in China an indefinite humanitarian status to protect them from harassment, extortion, trafficking or forced repatriation to North Korea

• Bill is called the “Scoop Jackson National Security and Freedom Act of 2005”

• Mode of action: “limit the total annual value of primary imports from China into the U.S.” if China continues to violate obligations under international law concerning refugees
“I want to live like a human being for one day. I am a human being. How can I be sold like this? I need freedom.”