

Discrimination

“Every North Korean citizen is assigned a heredity-based class and socio-political rank over which the individual exercises no control but which determines all aspects of his or her life.”

United States Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (2012)

North Korea's *songbun* system is a rating of political reliability which affects all aspects of a North Korean citizen's life. An individual's *songbun* is determined by the history of his/her family and the individual's background at the time of birth and, realistically-speaking, elevation of *songbun* is impossible. The North Korean social stratum is divided into three classes: a loyal 'core' class, a 'wavering' class, and a mistrusted 'hostile' class.

- 'Core' class: Understood to exhibit absolute loyalty to the Kim dynasty and to be trusted by the government. The core class mostly resides in Pyongyang. They occupy positions as high-level government bureaucrats or soldiers, and consequently hold considerable power in North Korean society. The core class comprises 25 per cent of the population and benefit from receiving most, if not all, foreign aid channelled to North Korea.
- 'Wavering' class: The government regards people within this class to hold a 'doubtful' attitude toward the North Korean leadership and political system. This segment makes up 55 per cent of the population, and lacks basic human rights, experiencing difficulties in accessing medical aid, education and employment opportunities.
- 'Hostile' class: The hostile class makes up the bottom tier of the *songbun* class system. They face serious discrimination and daily infringement of their human rights. Most prisoners in political camps belong to this segment. Those who are not imprisoned are also subject to hard physical labor under dangerous conditions, forcibly interned in harsh and isolated areas, with limited access to basic necessities such as food, water, medical support and education. Foreign aid rarely reaches this class of people.

About PSCORE

People for Successful COrean REunification (PSCORE) is a non-profit, non-religious and non-partisan NGO based in Seoul. PSCORE was founded in 2006 by Kim Young-II, a former North Korean soldier who escaped the country with his family, to create a platform to discuss democracy and human rights through a series of programs such as our Mentoring program and our Human Rights and Democracy program. We also provide emergency aid to North Korean refugees in China and help North Korean defectors become self-sufficient, because we believe that they can actively contribute to the reunification process. All of our programs are designed to garner support for the Reunification of North and South Korea.

Activities

- Help North Korean orphans in China
- Set up safe houses for North Korean refugees in China
- Run education program for North Korean defectors
- Assimilate North Korean refugees, of which about 70% are women, into South Korea

Donation

Your contribution can make the greatest difference in the life of a North Korean defector. With your help, PSCORE can continue to provide opportunities for North Korean defectors to attain fulfillment in their lives.

Account name: People for Successful COrean REunification
Account number: 630-007612-388
Bank Name: KOREA EXCHANGE BANK/MOKDONG TRAPALACE WM CENTER BANCH BR.
Swift Code: KOEXKRSE
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**What you need to know about
human rights in**

NORTH KOREA



Famine and Starvation

"It has been so long that we have forgotten the taste of rice. Thus, our rice is tree bark. Our food grows in the mountains. It has to push through the rocky soil to grow, and so it is painful to eat. In this country, the mountains are all bare and we do not even have enough trees, so hundreds die from starvation."
Jeong Seong-Sahn, 'Our food' from the North Korean refugee poetry collection *'I sell my daughter for a dollar'* (2008)

The collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, upon which North Korea had depended for aid, led to economic difficulties in the 1990s. By the mid-1990s the centralized distribution system in North Korea was giving way, and had stopped full-scale distribution. Consequently the late 1990s gave rise to the so-called 'Arduous March,' a period of severe famine, and the complete collapse of the distribution system upon which the North Korean people were entirely dependent. During this period three million people died of hunger in North Korea, mass starvation on a scale extremely unusual during peacetime.

In late 1996, in an effort to encourage individuals to find food for themselves and create a self-sufficient food system, the North Korean government distributed just four days' worth of rations per month through various institutions, factories, and other commercial establishments. Shortly after the collapse of the centralized distribution system, there was an emergence of some new markets and a black economy. Despite this small surge, UN OHCHR in 2013 reported that approximately one in four North Korean children were suffering from chronic food insecurity and hunger.

The international community believes that the government's excessive spending on nuclear testing, rocket launches and propaganda is the root cause of chronic food shortages in North Korea. For instance, 80 per cent of the entire population could have been fed for a year, for the cost of the failed rocket launch in April 2012.



North Korean Defectors

In the late 1990s, the number of North Korean citizens defecting to other countries started increasing, particularly those seeking asylum in the face of economic challenges and the food crisis. Initially most fled as a means of survival to escape starvation. More recently defectors come in search of basic freedoms and human rights.

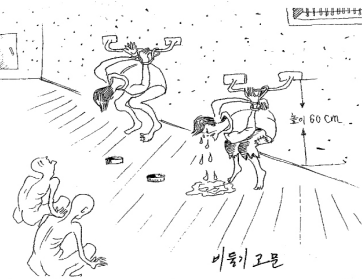


Photograph of a North Korean mother and child running to reach the safety of an embassy guarded by Chinese officials

Those who have escaped have testified that the punishment and torture that defectors face at these camps is far worse than the conditions in political prison camps.

The North Korean government under Kim Jong-Un has started to reclassify defectors as "hostile" and increased persecution of their families. After the death of Kim Jong-Il in 2009, the government declared that not only would anyone who defected during the 100 days of mourning be executed, but up to three generations of their families would also face the same fate.

Drawing of 'pigeon torture,' by former prisoner Kim Kwang-il



North Korean defectors in China are subject to human trafficking, forced abortions and imprisonment, and live under constant fear of being repatriated. If they are repatriated to North Korea, they are exiled to a concentration or "re-education" camp specifically designed for defectors where they face life-long sentences of violence and torture.

North Korean Political Prison Camps

"Factionalists or enemies of the state, whoever they are, their seed must be eliminated through three generations." Kim Il-Sung (1972)



Likened to Auschwitz, the political prison camps of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's are sites of exile, designed not only to isolate individuals who are considered to threaten the North Korean system but also to punish up to three generations of their families. Political prisoners are not afforded any rights or judicial procedure before being placed in the concentration camps. Modeled on 1947 Soviet gulags, North Korean political prison camps have undergone a series of reforms leaving four confirmed sites in operation as of February 2014 when the United Nations published its commission of inquiry into human rights in the country. Between 80,000 and 120,000 people are estimated to be incarcerated within these sprawling camps, suffering from torture, starvation and forced labor.

There are two basic types of political prison camps - fully restricted zones of total control and 'revolutionary' zones. Camps in fully restricted zones of total control hold prisoners with life sentences, where death becomes the only means of escape. Political prisoners are eventually 'released' from camps in designated revolutionary zones, for example Camp Yodok No.15. The political prison camps take the form of isolated villages, where male and female prisoners of all ages live in designated houses. They are forcefully assigned up to 16 hours of harsh physical labor daily and are subject to brutal acts of violence, torture and abuse. In addition, food is withheld if their labor quota is not met and, as a result, most prisoners suffer from starvation and chronic malnutrition.