

**American Leadership in the Asia Pacific, Part 3:
Promoting Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law**
Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific and Cybersecurity Policy
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

July 12, 2017

**Statement of
Ambassador Robert R. King**

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Senior Advisor to the Korea Chair
Former Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues, Department of State

Mr. Chairman; Senator Markey; Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Subcommittee today. Thank you, also, for holding this hearing. As you know my special interest and focus for the last seven years has been promoting human rights and democracy in North Korea—the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea (DPRK).

This hearing is particularly appropriate and timely. In the last few months the United States has given particular attention to security issues involving the North. This attention is fully warranted. I am very concerned, however, that in giving proper attention to security issues we not lose sight of the critical importance of human rights in our policy toward the North.

It is important to keep in mind that a country which brazenly and openly violates the human rights of its own citizens is a country that will not hesitate to use weapons of mass destruction against neighboring countries. A country that sends agents to murder the half-brother of its leader will have no reluctance to use similar tactics against citizens of countries it fears.

Mr. Chairman, I want to mention the critical role that the Congress has played in pressing Administrations—both Republican and Democratic—to give attention to human rights in our policy toward North Korea. The overwhelming support for adoption and reauthorization of the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004 reflects the bipartisan consensus and the importance of this issue. Congressional interest in North Korean human rights is a principal reason for the progress that the United States has been made over the last decade in pressing North Korea on its abysmal human rights record. I am delighted to see that this Committee is continuing that role.

One of the most important recent steps forward was the creation of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on DPRK human rights violations and its ground-breaking report which was issued in 2014. That report concluded that the DPRK regime systematically violated the human rights of its own people—including freedom of thought, expression and religion; freedom from discrimination; freedom of movement and residence; and the right to food.

The Commission of Inquiry concluded that North's human rights crimes involve "extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation."

Mr. Chairman, it is important that we continue to press the North on human rights. There are several steps that I would urge the Administration and Congress to pursue with regard to North Korea.

First, we should continue our active efforts at the United Nations. The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva has played a critical role on human rights. We need to continue our active participation in that forum. We have found broad support in the UN General Assembly in New York. By substantial majorities, the General Assembly has approved resolutions critical of the violations of human rights by the North. We need to continue our effort there as well. The UN Security Council has discussed the North's human rights abuses for the last three years. That would not have happened if the United States had not played an active leadership role. It is important that we continue our engagement and leadership with UN agencies on this vital issue. United Nations actions in the past have given our human rights efforts international legitimacy, and this has amplified our efforts.

Second, Mr. Chairman, we need to continue to encourage the free flow of information to the North. The availability of accurate information about events beyond the borders of the North limits the ability of the dictatorship to manipulate its own people. We need to continue robust American support for the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and other programs to increase access to digital information. The impact is long term, but it is vital to press the North in directions that lead to a government more responsive to the interests and desires of its own people.

Third, we must continue to support refugees who flee North Korea at great personal risk to their own and their families' lives. Only a few of these refugees have chosen to come to the United States, but we should aid those who have chosen to settle here. We must also support the South Korean government in its humane and generous refugee program for their brothers and sisters from the North. And we must press China to permit those refugees from the North who seek to escape through China.

Fourth, we must not ignore the humanitarian needs of the North Korean people. Admittedly, the brutal conditions in the North are the result of a government policy that places the needs of the bulk of its people well below the priority for luxuries for the leadership and the development of nuclear weapons and missiles. If, however, we can determine the legitimate humanitarian needs of the people, and if we can be certain that assistance is provided to those most in need, we should consider providing such aid. We should also assist private American humanitarian organizations that do provide such aid when it is directed to those in need.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we should think carefully about travel by American citizens to North Korea. Over the past decade more than a score of American citizens have been detained by the

DPRK. They have been held in isolation and have suffered from their imprisonment. The most tragic and heartrending case was the American student who died shortly after his return to the United States in a condition described by medical personnel as “unresponsive wakefulness.” Many hundreds of Americans visit North Korea each year; most return without a problem. Some of these are engaged in important medical and other humanitarian efforts, but some go to get bragging rights to participate in the Pyongyang Marathon or for other “adventures.” If the Congress does consider a travel ban to the North, an exception should be permitted for travel by Americans involved in humanitarian and other such worthy efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for considering North Korean human rights, democracy and rule of law in United States policy. I look forward to any questions Members of the committee may wish to raise.

#