

release

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NORTH KOREA CAMPAIGN 2011

One Day

release
international
voice of persecuted christians



North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (right) watches a military exercise in 2010. Photo: Reuters.

★ *North Korea* *One Day*

The notoriously repressive regime of North Korea continues to be the worst persecutor of Christians in the world. Join our new campaign for 2011 to pray and take action so that One Day the nightmare will end.

ONEDAY

Mr Sung (not his real name) is no stranger to pain. As a teacher back in North Korea he cradled two of his students in his arms as they died, emaciated from hunger; he has suffered torture at the hands of the North Korean authorities and has lived as a beggar on the streets. But even all this cannot compare with the pain he feels when he remembers his mother's death.

'As long as the nightmare of her slaughter wakes me up, the pain goes on,' he says.

ESCAPE

Mr Sung and his mother had escaped from North Korea into China in the 1990s to look for food but in 2001 his older brother persuaded their mother that it would be better for her to return to North Korea with

him because of the difficulties faced by those living illegally and without any status in China.

Mr Sung told Release: 'In 2001 my older brother came to China and said it would be better to return to North Korea. "If we die, we need to die with our own name," he said. "Let's at least die in our own country."

'So I travelled with my brother and mother to the Tumen river that runs along the border between China and North Korea. When we arrived I noticed that there was a truck parked on the North Korean side, which had been there since the morning. That truck was very suspicious to me but my brother said, "It's okay. Let's believe that we will be safe."

'We were standing on the bank of the river facing North Korea, when my mother knelt down and prayed. She made me sit



down in front of her, put her hands on my head and prayed so fervently. I think she had a foreboding about it because she mentioned that this could be our last time together.

'She told me that I must survive and go back to South Korea, which is where my father was from, and I must become a pastor.'

There were many people fishing on the Chinese side and they all said farewell to her.

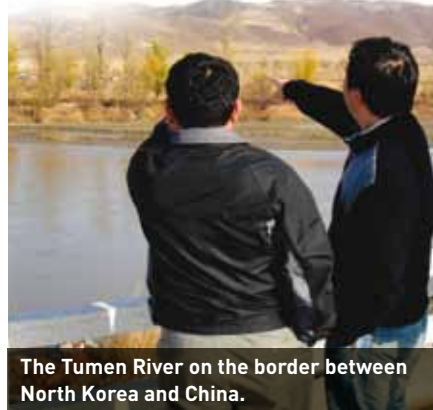
'They were beating my mother and brother with a gun'

'My brother then lifted her on to his back and they swam across as I watched from the Chinese side. A while later I then saw two soldiers come out from the truck. Two more people had been hiding behind the vehicle and as I looked I saw they were beating my mother and brother with a gun. One of the soldiers then stabbed my brother with a bayonet. My mother was being beaten with the butt of a rifle.

'I was going crazy just watching. I couldn't even hear their screams. It went on for about an hour. All the fishermen were watching and they were saying, "How can North Korean Kim Jong Il do that to his own people?" I couldn't stand what was happening. After they had beaten my mother and brother they kicked them into the river. I became so mad that I tried to jump into the river but the fishermen held me back and said, "If you go into the water as you are now, you will die with them."

Although Mr Sung has fulfilled his mother's request to become a pastor, the memory of her death is obviously still very painful. 'I have forgiven those who killed my mother and brother, but I cannot help but feel the guilt of losing her.'

Mr Sung is not alone. Countless numbers of North Koreans, including many who turn to Christ after getting out of North Korea, carry the burden of a nightmarish past. •



The Tumen River on the border between North Korea and China.

Concentration camps

'If there is a hell in this world then it is the North Korea concentration camps,' former prisoner Mr Kim told Release.

Mr Kim was caught by the Chinese police after escaping from North Korea and sent back. 'I was treated as a political criminal and sent to Yodok camp for five years. Yodok is not like a prison: it is 20 kilometres wide and people live inside houses; they get up and work and sleep. That's the cycle. Most of the people there have not had a trial and nobody outside will know whether they are alive or dead. There is only fear and absolutely no connection to the outside world. The food crisis is bad in North Korea but it's even worse in the camps. People die of malnutrition.

'If anyone was found praying they would disappear'

'One prisoner who escaped was caught and brought back to the camp and shot in front of everyone.

'If anyone was found praying they would disappear. One person was caught and they asked him, 'Who told you about God?' He replied that he found God through nature. He had some disease on his arm and they cut off his hand. No one knows what happened after that.'

Mr Kim himself was brutally abused when he neglected to greet one of the guards. 'They handcuffed me and made me sit on burning rocks which was very painful.'

At that time families were allowed to stay together but today that is not the case.

'Nowadays they are all separate and will not know what has happened to another member of the family. I believe the situation is getting worse.'

Inexplicably Mr Kim was released from Yodok in 1997 and during the prevailing food crisis managed to escape into China. It was there that he met a missionary and was baptised before making the journey to South Korea.



Mr Kim, a Christian, spent five years in one of North Korea's infamous concentration camps.

NO FREEDOM

'Life in North Korea is about survival. We cannot say it's a human life: there is no freedom, no freedom to speak and no religion to believe,' Mr Sung told Release.

'People say that maybe three million people died of hunger in the food crisis that started in 1995 but I believe that figure should be nearer five million.'

Mr Sung tried to escape from North Korea but was caught by the security service. For three days he was chained up, beaten and kicked but managed to escape by jumping out of a second-storey window.

'I am now a South Korean citizen but if I went to China and the Chinese police knew I was from North Korea, they would send me back to North Korea.'



Mr Sung's parents, four brothers and one of his two sisters were all killed by the North Korean authorities. He and his youngest sister are the only members of his immediate family still alive.

Mr Sung says the reason that Christians are persecuted is that North Korea's first leader, the late Kim Il Sung, knew that communism could not succeed while Christianity existed.

'He was born into a Christian family and he knew that Christianity would lead to the abolition of communism so he was eager to prevent it.

'After the Korean war, as they began to form a country, he based everything on the Bible, including the policies and laws, but he changed the important words, replacing God with himself.'

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Every year untold numbers of North Koreans escape from the repressive regime of Kim Jong Il in search of freedom. Most defect while legitimately visiting China or Russia, but some flee illegally across the border into China. There they may be helped to reach safety by a secret network of activists.



JOIN OUR NEW CAMPAIGN

This year Release is campaigning on behalf of Christians in North Korea, urging believers in the UK to pray and take action to help their persecuted brothers and sisters in what is known as the 'hermit kingdom', and also to support North Korean Christians now trying to adjust to life outside.

Throughout the year we will be highlighting their plight and how you can respond. At the end of the campaign we will be presenting a petition to the North Korean embassy in London. A copy of the petition is included with this magazine so please take a moment to sign it and stand with persecuted followers of Christ in North Korea.

PETITION

Please also ask your friends and members of your church to sign too and return the form to us as soon as you are able. You may make as many copies as you need,

and can download it from our website www.releaseinternational.org/current where you will also find an online version of the petition. Please share this link with your friends and Christian contacts.

We plan to make an interim presentation to the North Korean embassy mid-year, with the final presentation early in 2012.

As well as signing the petition please also pray: that the petition will make a difference to the lives of Christians in North Korea, whether believing in secret or suffering in prison for their faith; that Pyongyang, the capital, will again be known as the 'Jerusalem of the East'; that believers will be free to worship Christ openly and without fear of persecution and that, one day, revival will come to the hermit kingdom.

As part of our 'One Day' campaign Release is producing a short DVD detailing the plight of North Korean Christians that features interviews with defectors and those who work with them. Full details will be given in the May edition of *Release*.

NORTH KOREA



North Korea today remains one of the most repressive nations on earth – especially if you're a Christian.

Citizens are obliged by law to display in their homes portraits of the late Kim Il Sung, North Korea's first leader, and his son, current ruler Kim Jong Il. The government ideology of *Juche* ('self-reliance') is effectively a state religion – with its own 'hymn book' of 600 songs that venerate Kim Jong Il and his father.

Having another 'faith' is seen to be highly subversive – and anyone refusing to accept the 'Dear Leader' as the supreme authority is likely to be severely punished.

BANNED

All Christian meetings, Christian literature and Bibles are banned – forcing all believers to meet secretly, at great personal risk to themselves and their families.

Many Christians have been sent to prison camps as political prisoners and subjected to brutal treatment in appalling conditions. Entire families are known to have been imprisoned if just one member is found to be a Christian, or in possession of a Bible.

The number of Christians in North Korea is unknown. Before the Communists came to power, there were said to be 300,000 believers and the capital Pyongyang was known as 'Asia's Jerusalem' because of the strong influence of Christianity.

During the Korean War (1950-53) many fled to South Korea or were martyred.

Nobody knows how many Christians there are today inside North Korea. The BBC has estimated that 'despite the persecutions, it is thought up to 30,000 North Koreans may practise Christianity secretly in their homes'. A Release partner believes the number could be as high as 100,000.

The North Korean regime maintains a façade of religious freedom. As recently as 1998, it opened three churches in Pyongyang. However, these are widely considered to be showcases for foreigners: sermons contain political material supporting the regime.

To escape this oppressive regime, every year untold numbers of North Koreans defect while visiting China or Russia on work visas, or even flee illegally across the border into neighbouring China. Most hope to reach South Korea, where the Government provides financial support to help them to resettle.

But to reach South Korea, or other nations such as Laos, Thailand or Vietnam, the defectors must travel thousands of miles, and avoid being caught by North Korean agents or Chinese security forces.

North Korean women are especially vulnerable, and are preyed upon by human traffickers, who sell them into forced marriages or prostitution in China.

Every year untold numbers of North Korean defectors flee across the border into neighbouring China to begin a dangerous journey in search of freedom.



One of the 'show churches' in the capital Pyongyang: designed to make foreign tourists think that North Korea permits religious freedom in the country. The truth is very different. Photo: Reuters.

CURRENT TENSIONS

Since the 1950-53 war, North and South Korea have been involved in a number of incidents. Relations between North and South Korea are increasingly strained, and the North's efforts to build nuclear weapons fuel regional tension.

1987: A bomb planted by agents of the North on a South Korean airliner kills 115

1999: A North Korean boat is sunk in the first naval battle since the Korean War

2006: North Korea conducts first nuclear test

March 2010: The North torpedoes a Southern naval ship, killing 46

November 2010: Rocket attack on the South's Yeonpyeong island kills two marines

PRAY FOR NORTH KOREA

- North Korea periodically suffers from famine, resulting in untold millions facing malnutrition and starvation. Pray for good harvests, and that all citizens may receive enough food to survive.
- Pray for all Christians held in camps: that God would be their strength and shield.
- Pray that God will once more bring revival, justice and good government to the North.

RELEASE'S MINISTRY

Release works through local Christian partners to serve North Koreans who have defected. This has included pastoral care and support, the provision of safe houses, and Christian literature and Bibles. •



THE LIFE OF A DEFECTOR

Chulho Kang, a defector who converted to Christianity after escaping into China, now pastors a church of about 70 North Korean defectors in South Korea.

'The problem for defectors is that it is very hard for them to accept the Bible and throw away the communist thinking they have learned in North Korea. Juche ideology is very similar to Christian theology and they know that they were deceived by Kim Il Sung. In North Korea, Kim Il Sung is God and we were the believers. However, we are trying our best to open their hearts so they can really accept Christ.'

Life in prosperous, capitalist South Korea can also be hard to adjust to. Another pastor in South Korea told Release: 'The South Korean Government provides for basic needs such as housing and some money but they cannot help them with issues such as loneliness and the need to be part of a family.'

'Defectors get hurt because they compare themselves and what they have with South Koreans. Even though we are both from "Korea" we live in a society that is totally different. The two cultures are very different and it takes time for them to adjust and adapt. The result is that they do not want to make close relationships with South Koreans.'

'Please pray that the defectors can adjust. I believe that North Korean defectors are gifts of God who will be used in the reunification of the two countries.'



Make a difference

I first heard about release:potential at **PLATFORM**. I went on the drama workshop which encouraged me to experience life through the eyes of the persecuted church. The event opened my eyes and helped me see that persecution is real and happening all over the world and there is something I can do about it. **PLATFORM** enabled us to use our gifts and talents to raise awareness, giving a voice to those who suffer for their faith.

After the event, with a heart on fire for persecuted Christians, I spoke to Carina and asked if they needed any volunteers in the future. Two weeks later I was driving down to Eastbourne with Carina and Jo, volunteering on the exhibition stand for Youth Work the Conference.

'No matter your age, circumstances or qualifications you can make a difference'

Volunteer Hannah

Volunteer Hannah

Volunteering for release:potential was such an amazing experience. Working alongside these two lovely women, who have such a passion to see change in the lives of the persecuted, really inspired me.

It was great to meet other youth workers and to learn more about what release:potential does. Being part of release:potential is not only life-changing, but it empowers me as a young person. My time there taught me that no matter your age, circumstances or qualifications you **can** make a difference.'



Hannah Helvadjian, 19 yrs

release
:potential

keep Christ the main thing

They weren't frontin, they hand cuffed Him
It's killin me how they're taking the liberty
for nothing

Feelin' the ache an' dirt, under my knees
As I pray in turn with my families needs
To see our loved one back an' haps to
see me

Not just the fact he's released

Coz all we're tryna do is seek peace
But they react by making my brother bleed
on the street

An' I know, Yahweh's great, it's why i'm
tryna pray

But what diff' can a mustard seed make?
I guess I just gotta go with the flow
An' hope he shows me how to cope with
this road

His eyes are on the sparrow, so i guess
they on me

So even though it's hard to follow,
somehow I do find peace

They say to live is Christ and to die is gain
Tonight i might receive that gain
Why? Cos looking back in hindsight
Half my church received that gain!

But, ima maintain the main frame
Keep Christ the main thing and break
Satan's chain

So I'll awake slaves from their plain grave
It's a great day when they aim to be
maintained by grace

Yes I'll be livin' the mission driven to see
sinners risen

Risen from their prison forgiven and
delivered

And be willin' to killin' an arm and a leg
just to follow the steps of what my
Father said.



Emmanuel Amardie-Mensah
from Croydon **PLATFORM**
November '10

PLATFORM is a unique experience for young people. Using the power of creative arts **PLATFORM** helps young people engage with the harsh reality of Christians suffering persecution around the world. To find out more about **PLATFORM** coming to your area visit www.releasepotential.org/platform

release:potential needs volunteers to join us at Big Church Day Out, Soul Survivor and Momentum. Find out more now at www.releasepotential.org/volunteer

release
international
voice of persecuted christians

Our ministry involves:

Showing God's compassion

providing for the needs of the families of martyrs and prisoners

Serving God's church

enabling them to survive persecution and its effects

Sharing God's love

helping the persecuted church bring to Christ those who are opposed to the gospel

Spreading God's Word

supplying Bibles and literature to meet the need for growth and evangelism

Speaking as God's advocates

being the voice of the martyrs and the oppressed

RELEASE SPEAKERS

Why not invite one of Release's team of development managers to speak in your church or small group?

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The Costly Call

For many women the call to follow Christ can require many sacrifices – as Pullamma discovered.

A frail woman in her sixties, with poor hearing and failing eyesight, Pullamma is from a small village in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

When she heard the gospel and accepted it she was the first person in her community to become a Christian. Pullamma had been ill at the time and was praying for a 'god' to heal her. Someone visiting the village shared the gospel with her, and she committed herself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a result, she was thrown out of her village. Local people snatched the two acres of land she owned, and denied her access to work or any means of providing for herself.

For several days she slept in the open air, under bushes, living – as she put it – like a nomad.

Her desire to continue following Christ shone through her adversity

She eventually managed to find friends who allowed her to sleep at their home. Release's partner in India, the All India Christian Council (AICC), heard of her plight and began advising her.

When Release staff met Pullamma last autumn her desire to continue following Christ shone through her adversity.

HEART2HEART WOMEN'S CONFERENCES



Join us for a special time of fellowship and prayer, and a chance to hear first hand from sisters who have faced persecution.

Saturday, May 21 10am-3.30pm
Christchurch, St Albans Road, Barnet,
Herts EN5 4LA

Tickets cost £7 (concession £5)

Saturday, July 2

Methodist Church, Badminton Road,
Downend, Bristol BS16 6NU

Contact the Release office on 01689
823491 for more information



Pullamma

CONTINUING STRUGGLE

Life continues to be a struggle for her. There are now a few believers living nearby who take turns providing meals for her.

With the help of our partner, she has approached the local government about the possibility of having a small piece of land on which she can have a more permanent home. Other options are currently being looked at by our partner, including some form of nursing home care where she can receive Christian love and support.

Pullamma's story is a reminder of how isolated a person can sometimes feel on becoming a Christian. Some of us may experience this, if we find ourselves to be the only Christian in a local neighbourhood, or place of work (or if no other member of our family is a Christian). In such circumstances any true Christian fellowship we find is a vital lifeline.

PLEASE PRAY

Please pray for Pullamma, and thank God that she remains a follower of Christ. Pray also for AICC staff who are seeking to help her; that God will give them wisdom in knowing the best way forward.

Encouragement at the Pakistan High Commission



In January I had the privilege of representing supporters in the UK and Ireland, and Christian partners in Pakistan, when I

presented our petition to the Pakistan High Commission in London. I was joined by our patron, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali. We had been given an opportunity to talk with the High Commissioner himself, which was an encouraging sign.

As we entered the High Commission the congeniality of both the receptionist and the third secretary was professional and respectful. Waiting for a few moments in the reception hall, some seemed curious as to what was in the two large boxes of papers we were carrying.

We were taken up stairs to the sitting room in the High Commissioner's suite. A plaque on the wall commemorated the founding Governor-General of Pakistan, Mohammed Al Jinnah.

When the new nation of Pakistan was formed in 1947, following the partition of British India, Jinnah's vision was for a country where every citizen, of every class or creed, could enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities. This included religious freedom.

Religious freedom

In his policy speech of August 11, 1947, Jinnah declared: 'You are free: you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of

worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed.'

Jinnah's dream was symbolised in the country's flag: the Muslim majority were represented by the green, and the country's religious minorities (Christian, Hindu and others) by the white stripe. All were to be valued and treated equally.



Mindful of this heritage, we were introduced to the High Commissioner, Mr Wajid Shamsul Hasan, and members of his team. We talked about the condition of Christians in Pakistan and the adverse impact of the laws on their ability to live within society.

Growing extremism

We noted that extremists are increasingly taking the law into their own hands, carrying out extra-judicial killings and are seeking to force the moderate majority to maintain unjust laws which are used against minorities in Pakistan, not just Christians.

We urged the High Commissioner to challenge the Government in Pakistan to reform the unjust laws in a constitutional

review, including, but not limited to, the blasphemy laws. The High Commissioner promised to take up our concerns with President Zadari and Prime Minister Gillani personally.

As a moderate Muslim, Mr Hasan had a lot of sympathy with our concerns. His view was that extremist elements within Pakistan are rising in strength and that this is both potentially destructive and extremely unhelpful for the coalition Government.

Prayer vigil

I emphasised twice that the gathered group outside and across the road was not a protest, but a prayer vigil, and that people were praying for the people of Pakistan, for the High Commissioner and for a reform in the constitution.

Much to the surprise of his staff and the policemen on duty, Mr Hasan then announced that he would like to speak to the group outside.

He thanked those who had come for bearing the cold, for praying and for supporting the Pakistani people, and encouraged us all to remember that there are many being oppressed in Pakistan, including Christians. His statement was recorded by BBC Radio Four and ourselves (you can listen to it on our website at www.releaseinternational.org/audio).

Grace, strength and justice

At the end of his speech, I offered to pray for him, the High Commission and for the Government of Pakistan. Together we Christians prayed for God's grace, for strength and that justice would be upheld in Pakistan for all.

It was truly a very encouraging time. I really want to thank everyone who signed the 51,530-strong petition, and also the group of wonderful friends who gathered together to pray on that cold pavement behind the barriers in Knightsbridge. Thank you, each and every one of you.

Together we stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ who face persecution for their faith in Jesus. Praise the Lord for His grace and goodness! Let's press on and keep on praying and campaigning for Christians in Pakistan, in North Korea and in other nations around the world this year.

Andy Dipper, CEO



FOUNDATIONS

'The message I bring from the underground church is: "Don't abandon us! Don't forget us!"'

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, founder of Release, writing in *Tortured for Christ*.