

# **Third Conference on North Korean Human Rights & Refugees**

*Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights*

*Tokyo, 9-10 February 2002*

## **Baby killings in North Korean Gulag**

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### **Introduction**

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity of director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, an NGO based in Brussels (Belgium), I first want to thank Citizens' Alliance, and in particular Mr Benjamin Yoon, for all the efforts he has made to organize this third conference on human rights in North Korea and I feel honoured to have been invited by this long-standing activist for democracy and the rule of law.

I think I must tell you a few words about the part of the world I am coming from. My country of origin is Belgium but it is now part of a big political entity called the European Union: 15 member states, a common currency for 12 of them (the Euro), a common parliament with 626 members, 11 official languages, 375 million citizens. For less than one year, we have been informing the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council in Brussels. In the last issue of our electronic press service, we have distributed information about North Korean concentration camps and baby killings. This last topic has raised much awareness and our project manager has been interviewed by a number of media, including the Voice of America.

### **The Controversial Trip of a Belgian Political Delegation to North Korea**

North Korea is very far from Europe and only a big shock could raise the interest of public opinion and political decision-makers. In April 2000, an event triggered the awareness that was needed: the visit of a Belgian parliamentary delegation to North Korea led by a Belgian Stalinist politician who admired the North Korean political regime and wanted to convince his colleagues that it was not hell on earth but paradise on earth. Those high-ranking Belgian politicians then made history not by what they saw but rather by what they were prevented from seeing by the authorities of D. P. R. K. A Belgian TV team followed that delegation for several days and produced a documentary film that was both satirical and tragi-comic. The tragedy of the North Korean people was highlighted as it deserved and the comical side of the mission was provided by the Belgian actors who had made themselves ridiculous by getting

dragged involuntarily into this crude attempt to whitewash the North Korean regime. The documentary was very popular and was shown in France, in the Netherlands, in Sweden, in Germany and other European countries and raised public awareness on North Korean realities. Later on, British and French televisions made their own reports, sometimes with hidden cameras, and contributed to further break the silence surrounding that forgotten land and the lack of concern of the European public.

One of the many things that the Belgian politicians did not see was the system of concentration camps meant to silence the slightest expressions of dissent by using torture, terror, forced confessions, and executions.

The guided tour of the Belgian politicians included meetings with North Korean high ranking officials and well selected "ordinary people" but avoided any contact with those who have suffered in their flesh of the inhuman practices of the regime and who might have given first hand accounts of compulsory abortion, disappearance of newborn children and the systematic killings of babies by the North Korean authorities in the presence of their mothers.

### **Baby Killings: a Long-Standing Practice**

Unborn and newly-born babies are not spared the qualification of being "enemies of state" as their mothers are North Korean defectors who have been repatriated to North Korea against their will. The *a priori* incrimination of unborn babies transpires in the words of a guard in Yodok camp who admonished a pregnant woman, "How can a counter-revolutionary and an enemy of the people such as yourself dare to bear a child?"

The first reports of infanticide committed by North Korean authorities were provided independently by two former North Korean prisoners and two former concentration camp guards in 1995 and 1996. However, their witness accounts were considered too shocking to be true or just isolated cases.

During the first half of 2000, the Chinese authorities cracked down on the North Korean defectors hiding in China, with particular emphasis on women, under the excuse of stopping human trafficking. As a result, thousands of North Korean women, some of them already happily married in China, were arrested and handed over to North Korea against their will, including many pregnant women.

Throughout 2000-2001, several new reports and interviews provided details in different ways and for different locations in North Korea. All accounts certainly converged on the fact that North Korean authorities carry out systematic killings of babies. Thus the notion of infanticide in North Korea as an isolated incident was dismissed.

Here are excerpts of a number of recent testimonies that have been checked and cross-checked.

### **Baby Killings: Testimonies by Eye-witnesses**

#### ***Case 1: Onsong Changpyong Family Camp No.12***

- *Date of interview: 23 June 2001*
- *Witness profile: a young North Korean woman interviewed at her hiding place in China*

#### ***"I have witnessed baby killing while in detention in North Korea"***

*There was a nineteen year old pregnant woman prisoner in the camp. She screamed with pain and said that she was either in the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy. Her plead was ignored and she was forced to line up with other women for the day's work. She kept groaning and cried out for help. It was obvious that she was laboring and, finally, she was spared from the work. When we returned from work she was still sick. Next morning around eight o'clock she gave birth to a baby while an elderly woman from the Onsong district helped her. The camp guard immediately ordered us to kill the just born infant. The eldest woman had to cover the infant with blankets as instructed and to avoid punishment. The young mother recovered the next morning. Perhaps, her young body responded well. However, the elderly woman got sick from the shocking experience of killing a baby.*

*In the meantime another pregnant woman gave birth to a baby. The female prisoners were also told to kill it. So, some of us soaked a vinyl bag with water and covered the baby's face. Baby was wrapped up in a blanket and left on the cold floor to die. It took several hours before it died. The body was taken to a dump area nearby and buried. In these stressful days in the camp four more babies were born and they all met the same fate as described earlier.*

#### ***Case 2: Chongjin Prison No.25***

- *Date of interview: 18 April 2000*
- *Witness profile: The witness is in her fifties and was interviewed in Yanbian Prefecture of China*

#### ***"Help! North Korea is killing infants of prisoners!"***

*Seven or eight babies were delivered in a month at the camp. Their bodies would be thrown to animals to be gorged.*

*Security officers kicked bellies of pregnant women whose gestation was less than five months. Officers bragged they were "obstetricians." As the women were screaming out of severe pain, they ordered them to run around the campground to induce quick abortion. A woman from Hamhung City lost a four-month-old foetus. She couldn't afford to take time for recuperation. She had to go out to work immediately.*

### **Case 3: Hoeryong Camp No. 22**

- *Date of interview: 2 May 2000*
- *Witness profile: A refugee woman was interviewed at her hiding place in Yanji City, China. Four weeks after the interview, her hiding place was raided by the Chinese police and she has since been missing.*

*There were two pregnant, twenty something women locked up with us in our cell, and the guards were a lot meaner to them than they were to us in terms of physical abuse. For instance, the guards would constantly stab their bellies with ends of their clubs. They would actually try things to end their pregnancies, like dragging them out and pouring cold water on them all of a sudden.*

*Anyhow, both of the women were expecting in April, and one of them went into labour on April 15th, and had a relatively smooth delivery thanks to the help of older women in the cell. A guard rushed into our cell the moment he heard that she had given birth. He took the child from the mother's arms, put it on the floor outside the cell, and threw us a piece of wet vinyl. The guard threatened us as he slammed the door shut, saying that we would get a taste of his merciless club if we were unwilling to do away with the baby. Needless to say, we were to suffocate the child with the wet vinyl on its face, just like five other children before this one, according to a woman who had been in prison the longest. And that was how the baby's short and unhappy life came to an end.*