

WORKING GROUP ON NORTH KOREAN WOMEN SPRING 2018 REPORT

A WORKING GROUP OF THE NORTH KOREA FREEDOM COALITION

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NKWOMEN.COM

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As talk of summits, the Olympics, and K-pop concerts abound, our working group has been hard at work to raise the profile of North Korean women. Unlike Kim Yo Jung, sister of Kim Jong Un and media darling of the “Pyongyang” Olympics, the women of North Korea have no voice, no one to speak for them, no one to tell their story.

Our working group was founded in 2016 in collaboration with organizations around the world. We brought four, high-profile defector women to speak at a Side Event at the the U.S. Mission to the United Nations during the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, an organization dedicated to empowering women worldwide that has to date never discussed the plight of North Korean women.

Following the 2016 Side Event, our working group committed to hosting annual events during the UN CSW until North Korean women and the issues they face receive the attention they rightfully deserve. We hosted our first independent Parallel Event in 2017 entitled “North Korean Women: Destitution and Human Trafficking in China”, featuring the testimonies of three North Korean women, Lee So Yeon and Lim Hye Jin of the New Korea Women’s Union and Grace Jo of NKinUSA.

This year, we expanded our efforts and hosted multiple events over the course of a week. We brought two witnesses, Lee Yoon Seo from Seoul and May Joo from Los Angeles. This was Ms. Lee’s first trip to the United States and the first major public appearances for both women. We collaborated with Teach North Korean Refugees (teachnorthkoreanrefugees.org) and North Koreans in America Collaboration (nkiacollaboration.org) to find these witnesses and bring them to our events. NKinUSA also co-sponsored the events financially.

We began the week with a formal dinner of the North Korea Freedom Coalition at Sorak Garden on March 7. We were joined by NKFC members to welcome our speakers to Washington, D.C.

On March 8, International Women’s Day, we began our official schedule with a meeting at the U.S. State

Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Officials from various offices met with our witnesses and listened to their stories. One senior official stated that while there were many events happening at the State Department in honor of International Women’s Day, this was the most powerful and most important.

That same evening, we hosted our first major event at George Washington University in collaboration with GW Truth and Human Rights in North Korea (THiNK), the GW Institute for Korean Studies, and the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. This event was also in honor of International Women’s Day. Despite this event taking place on the eve of Spring Break, the event was well attended. We had over 100 people in the audience and multiple reporters covered the event. Myunghwa “Cathy” Kim (THiNK) translated and introductions were made by Bomie Lee (THiNK), Jisoo Kim (GWIKS), and Richard Haddock (Sigur Center). Suzanne Scholte, Chair of the North Korea Freedom Coalition, gave opening remarks and Jason West, Co-Chair of the Working Group and Vice Chair of NKFC, introduced the speakers and moderated the question and answer session. Ann Yang (GWIKS) helped coordinate the event.

Following the event at GW, we then travelled to Deposit, NY for an event at the West Branch Bible Baptist Church. Scott Payne, a volunteer from Open Doors, contacted us after seeing a speech by former Working Group speaker Grace Jo. He was very touched by her speech and wanted to host an event. The timing worked perfectly with our plans to host events in Washington D.C. and New York, so we agreed to bring our two witnesses to Deposit, NY.

Together with Cathy Kim from GW, we drove 6 hours from D.C. to Deposit, located in rural New York a few hours outside of NYC. We drove through quite a bit of countryside, and both women remarked that it reminded them of rural North Korea and China. We also drove through the mountains and saw snow, which was the first time Ms. Joo had seen snow since arriving in the U.S..

That evening we arrived in Deposit, a city of about 1500 people. The church that hosted us has a regular

attendance of about 30 people, but our event drew over 60 people thanks to the hard work of Mr. Payne in advertising the event. There was even a group of Korean churchgoers that travelled more than an hour from a nearby town to attend the event. The church graciously hosted a potluck dinner for us before the event. They even made a point of making a couple of dishes including rice, as they knew that our speakers were not familiar with traditional American cuisine.

After the event, many people had questions and were very curious to learn more about North Korea. The church also took a collection (they had previously hosted a fundraiser as well) and donated over \$500.00 to help cover our costs.

Finally, our team traveled to New York City where we had a full schedule of activities, including multiple interviews and meetings.

We first met with Ambassador Kelley Currie at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. Ambassador Currie was very touched by our witnesses testimonies and vowed to make sure that human rights would not become a bargaining chip at the upcoming talks between the U.S. and North Korea.

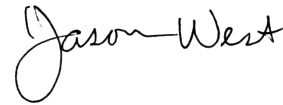
Following that, we met Ambassador Cho Tae-yul at the ROK Mission to the United Nations. We first met with Ambassador Cho almost exactly a year prior and were warmly greeted once again. Much of our discussion again focused on the upcoming talks with North Korea and Ambassador Cho assured us that he was committed to maintaining pressure on North Korea on human rights through the United Nations.

The culmination of our work was our Parallel Event entitled “Destitution in Rural DPRK and China”. In addition to our two speakers, Ann Buwalda (Jubilee Campaign) and Greg Scarlatoiu (HRNK) gave remarks and recommendations for continued action before the United Nations. Suzanne Scholte and Jason West also gave remarks and Kang Seo translated. Following the success of our 2017 event, we were given a prime location and timeslot. We filled the room to capacity with over 80 attendees. Unfortunately countless people were turned away. We are hopeful that anyone that was unable to attend was later able to find our videos online.

We want to thank all of our volunteers, supporters, hosts, and sponsors in putting on these events. We hope that our events and work has helped spread the word about the plight of North Korean women and the overall human rights situation in North Korea.

Plans have already begun for our 2019 events. If you are interested in collaborating with us, please contact Jason West at info@nkwomen.com.

Sincerely,



Jason West, Esq.
Co-Chair, Working Group on North Korean Women
Vice Chairman, North Korea Freedom Coalition
Treasurer, NKinUSA



Ann Buwalda, Esq.
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Treasurer, North Korea Freedom Coalition
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PRESS COVERAGE AND VIDEOS

UPI: Defectors: Rape is rite of passage for North Korean women (Elizabeth Shim)
<https://bit.ly/2EmYvnH>

Newsweek: North Korean Defector Says in Kim Jong Un's Regime, Women Do Not Know Rape is a Crime.
<https://bit.ly/2IvFd1Y>

VOA: 북한 내 여성들 “돼지보다 못한 삶”
<https://bit.ly/2uOwB4z>

VOA: 미 커리 대사, 탈북자 면담...“북한 여성 고통 잊지 말아야” <https://bit.ly/2qcKwvU>

Main Street Meets North Korea, Deposit, NY
<https://bit.ly/2GZKnGr>

Destitution in Rural DPRK and China, New York, NY
<https://bit.ly/2Iw2iSg>
