

Book Review

**RECENT SITUATIONS PERTAINING
TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA**

White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2000
(Seoul: KINU, 2000) p. 173.

Due to continued food shortage and a continuing economic crisis, it is widely known that families have been disintegrated and individuals are even suffering personality disruptions in North Korea. Thus, people's basic rights to live are being menaced there. Human rights violations against North Koreans defecting abroad and the protection of their human rights has now become a hot issue in international public debate as the refugees have rapidly increased along with the worsening food crisis in North Korea.

Considering this reality, KINU's Center for Social Issues and Human Rights in North Korea has surveyed and collected information and material concerning human rights in North Korea and has, since 1996, been publishing its annual report entitled the "White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea." Its goal is to enhance concern on the part of the domestic and international communities about the human rights situation in North Korea, and to protect and promote the human rights of North Korean people as well. This *White Paper on Human*

Rights in North Korea 2000 reviews the human rights situation in North Korea for 1999 according to the guidelines set forth in the International Covenant on human rights and analyzes major human rights issues in North Korea. The White Paper is written based upon materials obtained from extensive personal interviews with defecting North Koreans, human rights reports and related materials pertaining to human rights in North Korea released by government and non-governmental organizations.

Chapter 1 of the White Paper introduces the special characteristics of the socialist system and human rights concept in North Korea in order to help understand the human rights issues of North Korea. The North Korean political system here is analyzed as both a Confucian socialist state as well as a totalitarian state dominated by single party dictatorship.

Then, it reviews the human rights situation in North Korea in detail based upon criteria that the International Human Rights Covenant has adopted. According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or ICCPR, Chapter 2 examines grave violations in civil and political rights such as the right to life, illegal confinement and torture, unfair trial procedures, the right to equality and right to participate in politics, freedom of residence and movement, freedom of speech and press, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of thought and religion, and gender discrimination. It examines, in particular, that as deviant social behavior increases due to economic hardship, nationwide public executions have taken place by Kim Jong-il's "personal written order" in the latter half of 1995.

Based upon the standard set by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, or ICESCR, Chapter 3 reviews such violations as the right to life, social welfare rights and medical care, freedom of labor union activity and employment, and unfairness in education.

And lastly, Chapter 4 analyzes major human rights violations relat-

ing to current issues in detail, such as violations at political prisoner camps, situations of abductees, and violations of escapees and refugees rights. This White Paper 2000 reveals violations which occurred at the political prisoner camps; around 200,000 political prisoners are incarcerated in about ten 'management centers' without due procedures.

Despite insurmountable constraints such as the problem of ascertaining objectivity and verifying some of the information and materials, the White Paper 2000 has succeeded in providing an accurate account of the human rights situation in North Korea. Given the practical obstacles of obtaining sufficient information, the White Paper 2000 greatly helps to serve all of those academic specialists and policy-makers involved in North Korean studies.

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