

**Statement to the House Committee on International Relations**  
**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**  
**By Special Envoy Jay Lefkowitz**  
**April 27, 2006**

There is a direct link between the prevalence of freedom in the world and the prospects for security and peace. President Bush articulated this idea—which has a long heritage in America’s view of the world—very clearly in his second inaugural address.

As I see it, my mission is to help one of the world’s most oppressed people secure recognition for their inalienable rights including, ultimately, their right to government by their own consent. The other concerns that we and our allies have with North Korea—the counterfeiting of our currency, the smuggling of drugs, the proliferation of weapons, the effort to build a nuclear arsenal and to threaten their neighbors with war—are not merely coincidental to the human rights issue; rather, they are the predictable conduct of a government that possesses no apparent respect for the rights of its own citizens.

**Principal Objectives of the Special Envoy**

A key way to empower the North Korean people is to force a ray of light through the veil that Kim Jong Il has drawn over North Korea. The propaganda that he uses to suppress his people can be countered only by information about the outside world and information about what is actually going on inside North Korea. This can be achieved through enhanced radio broadcasting and other means to disseminate the type of news and information that the rest of the world takes for granted but which is hidden from the people of North Korea. Most North Koreans cannot travel abroad or even domestically. All broadcasting is controlled by the government. Radios come fixed to a single state propaganda channel.

However, there have been some hopeful signs that information is beginning to reach the North Korean people. Defector surveys suggest that many North Koreans have modified their radios, and know of others who have done so. The same surveys indicate that the number of radios smuggled from abroad may have increased substantially. This presents an opportunity to empower North Koreans through broadcasting: both with traditional tools like Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, and by supporting defector groups and democracy activists who can speak directly to their fellow Koreans.

The National Endowment for Democracy has taken the initiative in this area by funding a pilot program to train North Korean defectors and South Korean democracy activists in journalistic and broadcasting standards, and then supporting the broadcasting cost so that they can go on the air for a period of time each day to transmit information into North Korea. We support this project and view it as a possible precursor to a more robust broadcast platform that creates an open window to North Korea. We have also engaged the Broadcasting Board of Governors to examine ways to increase the quality and the quantity of information transmitted into North Korea by Radio Free Asia and Voice of America.

Defectors have told me that one of the most important things sustaining them in North Korea was the ability to have some link with the outside world. On April 26, I met with a North Korean defector, a former military officer, who said he was inspired to seek freedom based on radio broadcasts from South Korea. Broadcasting made the difference. With more information, the North Korean people increasingly will learn that just to the south, there is a vibrant and free democracy. They will learn that they do not live in a socialist paradise.

Another key objective is to make clear that we need to do more—and we can and will do more—for the North Korean refugees. Approximately 20,000 to 50,000 North Koreans are currently in Northeast China; some NGOs estimate the number is much higher. Since the 1950s, nearly eight thousand North Koreans have resettled in South Korea (nearly 1,400 in 2005 alone). Most refugees are in China. There is no question that they are neglected. They are not treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. Just recently, a defenseless North Korean woman, Kim Chun-Hee, was sent back to her tormentors in North Korea by the Chinese. She had escaped from North Korea and sought refuge at a school in Beijing. Her return occurred despite the pleas of governments and the United Nations that she be treated humanely. We are still looking for an accounting of Ms. Kim's whereabouts from the Chinese authorities. President Bush raised this with Hu Jintao during his visit. We continue to press China to uphold its international obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

We will press to make it clear to our friends and allies in the region that we are prepared to accept North Korean refugees for resettlement here. The United States has a tradition of being a refuge to vulnerable people seeking haven from despotic regimes, and we will do our part to help this vulnerable population.

These are steps that we can take to help the North Korean people but there are also policies that we need to avoid. Donor nations ought to ensure that our actions will help bring about change in North Korea, not just perpetuate existing conditions. For example, we need to ensure that the delivery of humanitarian aid is adequately monitored. The United States is very proud of the humanitarian aid that we have given to North Korea over the last decade to try to help alleviate the conditions of suffering and deprivation by famine. We must continue to insist that any humanitarian aid we provide is monitored to make sure that it is not sold, exported or used for the military or other state-favored constituencies.

When countries provide unrestricted humanitarian aid without proper monitoring, they are not necessarily helping the situation. In the past, we have stated to the North Koreans that the U.S. is willing to increase its food contributions if the North allowed increased monitoring to ensure that the food reaches the people. The North rejected this proposal. We call on countries to provide productive humanitarian aid, but to do it only in a way that clearly serves the humanitarian objective. This is especially necessary since the North Korean government has suspended WFP food distribution for the last four months and reduced the World Food Program's monitors from 47 to 10. The circumstances created by the government leave the future of WFP food assistance in doubt.

Press accounts have focused on labor practices in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Near Kaesong, a city just north of the Demilitarized Zone, 15 South Korean companies have recently

leased space for manufacturing. Eleven of the 15 companies are up and running; another four have projects under way. All would use North Korean labor. So far, the project has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into the North with more to come. A South Korean official enthusiastically described it as “a cooperative project benefiting both the South and the North, and at the same time, a peace project overcoming the wall of the Cold War through economic cooperation.” Some day, that may be the case, and I have little doubt that it may be much better to be a North Korean worker in Kaesong today than anywhere else in North Korea. But the real question for the international community is whether we should be insisting on fair treatment for the workers who make goods that will ultimately be sold internationally.

In light of North Korea’s track record, what we know about what goes on in Kaesong bears greater scrutiny now of wage practices and some labor conditions. According to some reports, the companies pay a base wage of less than two dollars a day per worker. Many receive more with overtime. These wages are paid to a North Korean agency in U.S. dollars, not to the workers themselves. The North Korean government deducts a 30 percent “social fee” from the wage, and then pays the workers in North Korean won at the official exchange rate. We do not know how much the workers actually receive. It is governed by its own law as a special economic zone, with specific regulations determined by a North-South management committee. We encourage the ROK to press the DPRK for the highest standards of transparency and accountability at the Kaesong project and underscore that the international community fully supports efforts by the ROK in this area.

On the broader issue of building international support for North Korean human rights, we have seen some positive signs. Last fall, the United Nations passed with broad support a resolution at the Third Committee condemning the regime’s conduct. We would welcome a clear ‘yes’ vote on any future resolution from all UN members. Nonetheless, the resolution won with broad support, and we expect that there will be even more support this fall if there is another resolution. A test of the new UN Human Rights Council’s effectiveness will be when it reviews all rapporteurs carrying over from the Commission on Human Rights, and whether the Special Rapporteur for North Korea will be maintained. If he is, Council members should pressure Pyongyang to let him into the country for the first time.

There are some encouraging signs. When I was in Seoul in December it was clear to me that many in South Korea care deeply about their brethren in the North. We need to energize people like this at home and abroad to get involved in this issue. Government officials clearly have a role to play in this, but the true leaders of this movement are likely to come from outside of government.

The U.S. will work with other democracies toward the day when North Koreans are free. We will strive to give them hope and help them to assert their inalienable rights. As President Bush said in a speech in Kyoto last November, “We will not forget the people of North Korea. The 21st century will be freedom’s century for all Koreans.”