



**DATE:** June 17, 2017

**SUBJECT:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Student Visit from Meridian International Center

### MAIN POINTS

- Strong inquiries regarding lack of North Korean human rights awareness in South Korea
  - Questions on direct refugee resettlement programs/organizations in the U.S.
  - Difficulty in approaching North Korea security situation without disregarding human rights aspect
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### EVENT OVERVIEW

**Date:** June 17, 2017

**Time:** 9:02 a.m. – 10:26 a.m.

**Location:** 1001 Connecticut Ave NW #435, Conference Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Washington DC 20036

#### Attendees:

- **Rosa Park, Presenter**, Director of Programs and Editor, HRNK
  - **American and Korean students** of the U.S. Congress – Korean National Assembly Exchange Program, organized by the Meridian International Center
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### SUMMARY:

Rosa Park gave a brief overview of HRNK for roughly 20 minutes. The remaining time was dedicated to Q&A.

Roughly a third of the students had little to no prior knowledge of the dire human rights situation in North Korea. The South Korean students asked interesting questions about a range of topics,

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including HRNK's funding sources, North Korean refugee resettlement process/programs in the US, the lack of North Korean human rights awareness in South Korea, and the North Korean Human Rights Act. The American students asked interesting questions about hypothetical scenarios of a reconciliation process without regime change, how to approach the human rights challenge despite the tense security situation, and HRNK's involvement with the US legislative and executive branches.

Some of the Q&A is listed in detail below:

**Q:** Where do you get financing for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval?

**A (Rosa Park):** All of our research is copyrighted and all of our interviewees sign a consent form. We follow US laws in terms of legal rights and release of information regarding North Korean refugees residing in the US. In regards to funding, we receive one third from private foundations, one third from individuals donors, and one third from the USG/State. Government funding is very recent, and we are not sure it will continue. We received the grants to continue to do work that was already ongoing. That work will continue regardless of USG grant availability.

**Q:** What has been Ambassador Nikki Haley's stance on North Korea, and are you optimistic on how she's currently handling human rights violations and US impact on what we can do to stop this?

**A (Rosa Park):** She is new so we haven't had a one-on-one yet but we are certain she is fully aware of the human rights situation.

**Q:** Should humanitarian activity be separated from politics?

**A (Rosa Park)** 1) Because of the way the North Korean regime operates, it is almost impossible to separate politics and humanitarian aid. Saying it's a political issue is not a negative thing, it's just a statement of fact. 2) In terms of decreasing humanitarian aid, that's a problem for us because the North Korean regime doesn't allow monitoring. North Korea has proven time and time again that they will divert the aid (e.g. rice, grains) for cash found in Russia's black market.

**Q:** Would you say the issue of human rights has gotten worse after Kim Jong-il's death?

**A (Rosa Park):** It has changed but it's hard to say whether it's better or worse. But our access to information has decreased and defections have decreased since Kim Jong-il's reign. North Korea has ramped up security and the Chinese have ramped up security. One improvement is that after the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry (COI), North Koreans have become more responsive and interactive. This is probably because Kim Jong-un was specifically mentioned in the COI so they became a little worried. They even have their own human rights report.

**Q:** How do you approach the human rights challenge, especially considering the tense security situation?

**A (Rosa Park):** We don't have direct access to the North Korean border so we focus on what we can achieve within the US – pushing the agenda that human rights is just as important as security. The regime holds power because they have control over this range of human rights so it is hand in hand with the issue of security. Ten years ago, no one in the US government wanted to talk about human rights. Now, we have the North Korean Human Rights Act, and South Korea passed their NKHR Act last year. Now people talk about North Korean human rights constantly. The US placed their first sanctions last year. As an NGO, it is our job to hold [our] government accountable.

**Q:** Do you feel like the Trump administration is not highlighting the human rights issue as much as the Obama administration?

**A (Rosa Park):** North Korean human rights are bipartisan and we've always had full consensus. If you look at the [latest speech when launching the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report](#), Secretary Tillerson mentions North Korean human rights and forced labor.

**Q:** Is there a way to spread information to North Korean refugees who have not identified themselves with any other organization in the US?

**A (Rosa Park):** We do our absolute best to protect the identity and safety of interviewees. We have never had a problem, although we have conducted interviews in the border areas of North Korea on several occasions.

**Q:** Is there a reason why North Korea is not tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC)?

**A (Rosa Park):** It was one of the recommendations of the COI. The problem with the ICC is that China and Russia will most likely never support it. The UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) or truth and reconciliation commissions also have slim chances.

**Q:** Does HRNK do any collaborative work?

**A (Rosa Park):** HRNK collaborates with the National Committee on North Korea (NCNK), the Korean the Korean Economic Institute of America (KEI), and the Holocaust Museum in Chicago. We also attend conferences in LA, NY, Boston.

**Q:** Does HRNK have any connections to South Korean society? South Korea does not have North Korean human rights coverage on specific subjects like women or gender challenges; the

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issues are usually about defectors as a whole. Is there any way HRNK can influence this trend of news reporting?

**A (Rosa Park):** We have an extensive network in South Korea. Every time we release a publication, we send it to every South Korean news agency, but we cannot force them to write about or showcase it. In general, the trend is that there is less of an interest in North Korean human rights in South Korea's society.

### Questions from American students:

- How does one gain defector status?
- Is there a particular reason to be called a defector rather than a refugee?
- What has been Nikki Haley's stance on North Korea, and are you optimistic on how she's handling the current North Korea HR violations and US impact on what we can do to stop this?
- How do you approach the human rights challenge, especially considering the tense security situation?
- Do you feel like the current administration is not highlighting the human rights issue as much as the last (Obama) administration?
- Have you published anything on the struggles of North Korean refugees in China? Are they online?
- In reference to Congress, have there been more inquiries for information from the legislators?
- Does HRNK interact with the executive branch?
- Given his lineage of despots, would you say Kim Jong-un represents a change in perspective in regards to human rights?
- Hypothetically, do you have a publication of policy recommendations to help the marginalized communities in the case of regime change?
- Hypothetically, could North Korea undergo a true reconciliation process without a regime change?

### Questions from Korean students:

- Where do you get financing for IRB approval?
- How is HRNK funded?
- Should humanitarian activity be separated from politics?
- Would you say the issue of human rights has gotten worse after Kim Jong-il's death?
- What kind of work is being done with North Korean refugees in the US?
- Besides publications, do you work directly with defections and human rights awareness in South Korea?

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- Why do you think South Korea doesn't fund HRNK?
- Does HRNK have any connections with South Korean society? South Korea does not have North Korean coverage on specific subjects like women or gender challenges; the issues are usually about defectors as a whole. Is there any way HRNK can influence this trend of news reporting?
- Is there a way to spread information to North Korean refugees who have not identified themselves with any organization in the US?
- What is HRNK's role in implementing the North Korean Human Rights (NKHR) Act?
- Does the NKHR Act include funding for resettlement?
- Is there a reason why North Korea has not been tried under the ICC?
- How did you, Rosa, start this work?
- Does HRNK do any collaborative work?
- Would it be more probable North Korea will break down based on an internal problem?
- What is HRNK's role in sending in more information?

*Report by: Elizabeth Yang, Research Intern*