



PUBLISHED BY

The New York Times

Saturday-Sunday, November 4-5, 2006

## Dealing with North Korea

After secret talks in China between Christopher Hill, the U.S. assistant secretary of state in charge of negotiations with North Korea, and his North Korean counterpart, the two sides announced plans Tuesday to resume six-party talks in Beijing on a deal to dismantle the North's nuclear weapons program.

The Bush administration's past refusal to make the concessions needed for such a deal has endangered Asian security and raised the specter of terrorists one day purchasing a nuclear device from North Korea. So it is good news indeed that the six-party talks that were suspended a year ago will be reconvened.

Given the stakes in the upcoming talks, there could hardly be a more delicate moment to focus attention on the crimes against humanity that the Pyongyang regime has committed against its own population. But that is precisely what a damning new report on humanitarian conditions and human-rights abuses inside North Korea has done.

Commissioned by former President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel and the former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik of Norway, the report condemns the North Korean regime for its role in a famine in the mid-1990s that may have killed more than a million people.

During that famine, the regime reduced its purchases of food from abroad in parallel to deliveries of international food aid. The money

saved in this way was then spent on the North's military establishment and on its nuclear program.

The report says that 200,000 political prisoners are subjected to brutal work regimens, starvation-level rations, and torture or execution for perceived infractions. Family members of alleged dissidents or political opponents are thrust into the North Korean gulag on the premise of guilt by association. According to the report, 400,000 people have perished in the gulag over the past 30 years.

The report recommends that the UN Security Council urge the North's leaders to grant access throughout the country to humanitarian organizations; release all political prisoners; and allow visits by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea.

These are worthy goals. And the United States can seek the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons and push for human rights at the same time. Indeed, if North Korea obtains the security assurances and diplomatic normalization it wants from Washington in exchange for ceding its nuclear and missiles programs, the regime may become more amenable to at least some of the recommendations in the Havel-Wiesel-Bondevik report.

But progress on both human rights and the nuclear issue will be possible only if it is clear that the two are not being linked to justify regime change in Pyongyang — the dangerous and futile ambition of administration hard-liners.

— The Boston Globe