

U.S. COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA

1101 15th Street, NW • Suite 800 • Washington, DC 20005 • 202/467-4765 • fax: 202/293-0258

September 4, 2005

Mr. Han, Ki-Soo
Director
Cooperation Fund Division
Inter-Korean Economic & Cooperation Bureau
Ministry of Unification, ROK

Dear Mr. Han,

Thank you for your interest in our work. Be assured that we share with your government the earnest desire for reconciliation on the Korean peninsula and improvement in the human rights and material conditions of the North Korean people. We also believe sincerely that your government has made important contributions in this regard. Clearly, we should keep the central focus on the behavior of the North Korean government, not on our more peripheral disagreement with the Ministry of Unification about how best to achieve a commonly held purpose, namely ameliorating suffering in North Korea.

We are also thankful for the information that you have provided on your efforts with respect to your efforts at monitoring your relief program, although some of that information confirms, rather than allays, our concerns.

Unfortunately, your letter also contains a number of misrepresentations of our position. It is not clear to us that you read the full report, reviewed the transcript of our press conference, consulted with your embassy's official who attended the press conference, or confirmed the alleged statements with us before posting your commentary. For your information, the report can be downloaded from the website of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea <http://www.hrnk.org/hunger/hungerReport05.pdf>. We would also be happy to provide you with a printed copy.

First, we did not say that your government attaches no conditions to the aid it provides. We argued, rather, that the conditions for South Korea's assistance appear to fall short of

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the protocols that have been worked out over time between the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) and the North Korean authorities.

It is our understanding based on a number of interviews with your colleagues at the Ministry of Unification (MOU), including those directly involved in the relief program, that to date the MOU has conducted no pre-implementation assessment of food needs in North Korea, and has issued no statement of the intended beneficiaries of its assistance or the plans for guaranteeing that such assistance will in fact reach the targeted beneficiaries.

Your letter notes the amount of grain donated, the “frequency of confirmation,” and the monitoring areas. Both the number of monitoring visits by South Korean inspectors and the areas of monitoring fall far short of those conducted by the WFP. For example, you refer to 10 site visits in 2004 and a projected 20 visits for the aid you are to deliver in 2005. However, the WFP currently conducts 50 to 70 site visits *per month*, conducted by approximately 40 foreign staff, and these not only include public distribution centers but ports, food-for-work sites and the full range of institutions receiving assistance. Moreover, the quality of South Korean monitoring appears to fall short of WFP standards as well, as it involves long pre-notification periods of approximately one month potentially enabling North Korean authorities to disguise true conditions at sites designated for inspection. It is our understanding from our interviews with your colleagues that the South Korea does not audit of the disposition of its aid beyond visual confirmation that rice is indeed stored in the public distribution center under inspection, much less issue its own ration cards on the WFP model.

South Korean assistance also continues to be provided in the form of rice that is the preferred staple of the elite rather than less desirable grains such as barley or millet that would be less prone to diversion and therefore more likely to reach vulnerable portions of the population.

We should point out that we are not alone in noting the greater potential for diversion of South Korean aid; a number of South Korean NGOs and commentators have made the same points.

As our report makes clear, we are not interested in diversion *per se*, but rather in the effectiveness of the aid program. One way of evaluating effectiveness is through surveys of the nutritional status of the targeted populations. As you know, the United Nations organizations have now conducted several of these studies to indirectly assess the efficacy of their efforts. To our knowledge, the MOU has conducted no similar evaluation of the impact of its own program.

You note quite rightly that South Korea has been a generous donor to the WFP. However, the share of total South Korean assistance provided through the WFP has fallen over time as your total humanitarian assistance has gone up. We note that you do not provide details on the share of your assistance through the WFP.

Food aid may have had other beneficial political effects, such as facilitating meetings with North Korea. However, we believe it is a bad precedent for the international

community to pay North Korea to fulfill its international obligations or to engage in dialogue. This strategy invites North Korea to withhold its cooperation for the purpose of being rewarded, as recent events clearly show. Moreover, these political benefits are offset by the potential that food aid is diverted to undeserving groups, including the military.

We should also point out that after we conducted interviews with your colleagues, we submitted a pre-publication draft of our report to them for comment and received no response.

Contrary to at least one erroneous press report, our belief is not that humanitarian assistance to North Korea should be cut, but that South Korea should bring its expertise on the country to bear by channeling a larger share of its assistance through the WFP. If South Korea were to do this, we believe that the humanitarian community as a whole would make much greater progress in guaranteeing that food aid is reaching its intended beneficiaries. We also believe that such a strategy would in no way impede your government's efforts to conduct other forms of economic cooperation with North Korea.

We also note that your Ministry has apparently published a rebuttal to our report on your website without providing us the opportunity to respond. We would appreciate it if this letter were also posted. We are taking the liberty of publishing your letter on the Committee's website along with this response, and will distribute our response to the South Korean press as well.

In conclusion, we believe that we share a common goal: that of alleviating hunger in North Korea, and a common belief that the international community should remain engaged in that effort. But we also believe that we should be honest with ourselves about the terms on which that effort proceeds.

Sincerely,

Stephan Haggard

Marcus Noland