

Nominee - Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues

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Testimony

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee for the position of Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues. I am grateful to President Obama and to Secretary of State Clinton for placing their trust in me and nominating me to serve our nation in this important position. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and with other Members of Congress to advance human rights in North Korea.

I would like to thank and introduce my wife, Dr. Kay King, who serves as Director of Inter-Parliamentary Affairs for the Speaker of the House. Both of us have had the great honor of working as congressional staffers for the past 25 years. Also here today are my son Nate and his wife Denys and their children Ashley, John, Robbie, and Andrew. A number of my colleagues from the House Foreign Affairs Committee and from the staff of the late Congressman Tom Lantos are here today as well, and I thank them for their support. I also want to thank Chairman Howard Berman of California, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Ranking Member of the Committee, Ms. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, for their generous introductions of me to the Committee today.

The government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is one of the worst abusers of human rights in the world. This has been documented in a number of reports by our government, international organizations, other governments, and nongovernmental organizations.

- The Department of State's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* identifies serious problems with the DPRK's human rights record. State security forces commit severe human rights abuses and political prisoners are subject to brutality and torture. Elections are not free or fair; the judiciary is not independent; and citizens are denied freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association. In addition, severe restrictions are imposed on freedom of religion and freedom of movement. Finally, we hear continuous and widespread reports of severe punishment for repatriated asylum seekers and trafficking of women and girls across the border into China.
- Just last week, the Department of State issued the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* and per the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, Secretary Clinton re-designated the DPRK a Country of Particular Concern.

- In August, the United Nations' Special *Rapporteur* on the situation of human rights in North Korea issued a report circulated by the Secretary General in which the *Rapporteur* said "rights and freedoms . . . are violated egregiously by the authorities in the DPRK on a daily basis, much to the pain and suffering of the ordinary population," and he called the violations "widespread, systematic and abhorrent."

The Congress has been a consistent supporter of efforts to assure that our policy toward North Korea promotes respect for the human rights of the people of North Korea. The position to which President Obama has nominated me was established under the North Korean Human Rights Act, which Congress passed in 2004 and reauthorized a year ago. This congressional support is important to our effort to improve the conditions of people in North Korea and those who have left because of these conditions. If confirmed, I will work closely with this Committee and with other interested Members of Congress in fulfilling my responsibilities.

The United States Government has been and remains deeply concerned about the human rights conditions in North Korea and the plight of North Korean refugees. In part this is a reflection of who we are as a nation. We were founded on fundamental principles of human rights, and our support for these rights is an essential part of who the American people are. At the same time, respect for human rights by the DPRK will have a significant impact on the prospect for closer ties with the United States and will be necessary for North Korea to fully participate in the international community.

If confirmed, I will work within the State Department and with other agencies to promote increased respect for human rights in North Korea and to seek independent sources of information about human rights conditions there. I believe that several opportunities are available to us to improve human rights in North Korea. While I do not believe that we will be able to change conditions quickly or radically, I do believe that we must seek to make progress where we are able at a pace that is sustainable.

- If confirmed, I will work to continue and expand our effort to identify concrete ways to address North Korean human rights abuses in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and bilaterally with our allies and other states in the region. In particular, I see the United Nations, including the UN Human Rights Council, as a forum where we can promote human rights in North Korea. I also see the many nongovernmental organizations that operate in North Korea as allies in this effort, and, if confirmed, I will work with these groups and organizations to bolster their work.
- We have made progress in expanding broadcasting into North Korea, and, if confirmed, I will continue this effort. This is important in breaking down the isolation of the North Korean people and making available independent sources of information inside the country. My first position after completing graduate school was with Radio Free Europe at a time when Central Europe was under Soviet domination, and I saw first-hand the importance of our international broadcasting in expanding human rights.
- The United States also remains committed to improving conditions for those who leave the DPRK. We continue to work with international organizations and countries in the region to help North Korean asylum seekers obtain protection, including by resettling some in the United States. Since passage in 2004 of the North Korean Human Rights Act, we have expanded efforts to protect and assist North Korean refugees. Since the Act was passed, 93 North Korean refugees have resettled in the United States and more are expected. If confirmed, I will work to continue and enhance our efforts to assist refugees.
- We have urged China to adhere to its obligations as a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, including by not expelling or forcibly returning North Koreans protected under those treaties. We have urged China to cooperate with the UNHCR in exercising its

functions, including allowing access to North Korean asylum seekers. If confirmed, I will seek effective ways to assist North Korean refugees.

- The United States continues to be concerned about Japan's abducted citizens and South Korea's POWs and abductees. If confirmed, I will participate actively in diplomatic efforts to support our partners in the resolution of these issues.

The Obama Administration is fully committed to promoting human rights and freedoms in the DPRK. Secretary Clinton recently affirmed, "The Administration is committed to identifying concrete ways to address North Korea's human rights abuses." If confirmed, I look forward to being an essential part of this challenging and important effort.

I would like to close by noting what Secretary Clinton said upon delivering the human rights report this year, the first under her stewardship of the Department: She said, "Our commitment to human rights is driven by our faith and our moral values, and by our belief that America must first be an exemplar of our own ideals. But we also know that our security and prosperity and progress is enhanced when people in other places emerge from the shadows to gain the opportunities and rights that we enjoy and treasure." Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I welcome any questions you may have.