

# Questions and Answers Following Speech on North Korean Human Rights After the Six-Party Talks

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The Heritage Foundation  
Washington, DC  
April 19, 2007

*Also: Heritage Foundation [Speech](#).*

**QUESTION:** First, I liked your remarks very much. But I contrast the remarks with the Administration's record. Radio Free Asia has a hiring freeze, there doesn't seem to be much of an expansion of broadcasting, we've let in less than two dozen refugees, China continues to jab wires through the wrists and noses of refugees and lead them back to North Korea with no apparent consequence in its relations with the United States. Thailand is about to send 54 refugees back to North Korea, which is a reversal of a more humane policy. Laos is about to send back 8. South Korea continues to turn refugees away and most shamefully sir, our own consulate in Shenyang recently turned away a group of North Korean refugees at the very front gate. And finally sir, I think your office, it would be fair to say, has been marginalized in the Six Party working group process. So is there a record that can contend on human rights of tangible accomplishment?

**LEFKOWITZ:** I think your critique is a fair critique. I think there's a lot more that we can do. There is probably a lot more that we should be doing and there is a lot more that the Congress can do to help us achieve the President's objectives here. Particularly now when we have a Democratically controlled Congress. We could use significant additional assistance. Not only financially in terms of appropriations to fund some of the programs we want to fund. But also in terms of making the issue of North Korean human rights a bipartisan issue. For reasons that really perplex me, at least over the past three years since I've been engaged in this process, the issue of North Korean human rights have been seen, at least in the United States, as very much the province of the right--of the evangelical right. Now, it may very well be that a lot of people on the evangelical right were involved in instigating the legislation that created this position. But I know from talking to a number of human rights organizations who are certainly not in sympathy with this Administration on a variety, indeed most, issues, that they feel passionately about the issue of North Korean human rights. And yet, there have been very few leading members from the Democratic party in the Senate or the House of Representatives, who have really made this a signature issue. And I think for the United States to elevate this issue, in the way that I think it deserves to be elevated, it requires genuine bipartisanship. I cannot speak, obviously in an open forum and in light of the classified nature of some of the cases, I can't really speak to some of the specifics of the refugee issues you have raised, except to point out that I don't think you're accurate in some of the claims that you are making, although I think there is no question that there is a great deal more that we can be doing. And frankly, it requires work throughout the Administration--leadership by not only the President, who is very committed to this agenda. I see that every time I talk to him about it. But leadership throughout the government in elevating this issue not only through the Six Party Talks, but also with our other friends and allies in the region. What we have seen is that when we do elevate this issue, we get results. The President directly raised this issue when he met with President Hu last year and for a brief period of time it looked like there was better cooperation from the Chinese government. Alas, when we are not paying as much attention, when the international press is not paying that much attention, they revert to their habits. We need not just a special envoy to focus on this issue, but we need the United States government in all of its apparatus, to engage more fully in this issue.

**QUESTION:** The North Koreans have pledged that for the \$25 million frozen in the Chinese bank, once they get their hands on it again, will be devoted to humanitarian aid programs. How confident are you that they are going to follow through with this pledge and how much are we actually monitoring them to follow through?

**LEFKOWITZ:** [Pause] Not at all. And not very. [Laughter] You know I am not confident because at this point here we are 60 days out from the Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> agreement and it does not appear that the North Koreans are living up to their obligations. President Bush said the day after the agreement was signed, and I'm quoting, "Now those who say that the North Koreans have got to prove themselves by actually following through on this deal are right, and I'm one."

That's what the President said. There are a number of requirements that have fallen on the North Korean side of the ledger. And I think we are still waiting to see them accomplish what they are required to do. So I certainly don't expect, unless there is a change in policy, that we are going to have any transparency in terms of how they spend that money. And I think it is incumbent upon us to insist precisely on that.

**QUESTION:** I'm from Reuters. Can you explain to us what stands in the way of a larger flow or a larger resettlement of North Koreans in this country, whether it be bureaucratic hurdles, procedural issues, third countries?

**LEFKOWITZ:** There are not really bureaucratic hurdles anymore in the United States. I think its fair to say that a couple years ago there were internal bureaucratic hurdles in terms of accepting North Koreans. And obviously in any given case of a refugee, we have got to satisfy ourselves that the refugee is genuinely a refugee and there are no security concerns. But we have actually got our act together bureaucratically with the United States Government. The problem, of course is, China, principally, does not allow the High Commissioner for Refugees to have access to people in northeastern China where they are found. And they are in violation of their international

obligations. Those people who are able to somehow escape, but also from North Korea to other northeast Asian countries, they run into problems because those governments are often fearful of upsetting either North Korea or China. So while we are working very hard to try and facilitate passage of these refugees, and frankly are making it clear to these countries - look you don't have to worry about a big inflow of refugees because we'll take them, we are prepared as a humanitarian effort by the United States, which has a long tradition of opening our borders up to people in dire need. And indeed some of our blackest marks in our history are when we've turned our back on refugees. Yesterday was the Holocaust memorial service just next door at the Capitol and certainly that's not a pretty chapter in our own history. So we are prepared to do this and yet we have got a lot of work to do, even with our allies in northeastern Asia because of the pressures from China and the pressures from North Korea.

**QUESTION:** Emma Chanlett-Avery from Congressional Research Service. I want to ask about your understanding of where specifically human rights and refugee issues will come up in the Six Party Talks process. I mean, certainly for full diplomatic relations you that mention it is important. Specifically, in the process of taking off the state sponsors of terrorism, that you yourself mentioned the Japanese abduction issue, and that's been noted in terms of their inclusion on the list. Although I'm not sure its an official reason or made the official list of criteria. Is it your understanding that Japan needs to be satisfied with that in order for that to take place? Because I think this comes up pretty soon.

**LEFKOWITZ:** I'm not sure that Japan has to be satisfied in order for the United States to take action although obviously we are looking at the entire conduct of the North Korean regime. Clearly the act of abducting foreign citizens, and its not just Japanese citizens who have been abducted, is certainly in my view an act of state-sponsored terrorism. I think North Korea was specifically put on that list because of other acts of terrorism, bombings of the plane and some other acts that took place over a decade ago now. But I think the human rights issues clearly will come up in the context of normalization of relations. I mean, we are clearly looking for a nuclear reduction agreement that is going to stick. North Korea clearly has an obligation not only to shut down and seal Yongbyon, but also to discuss a list of all of its nuclear programs, but in addition to that, the agreement makes clear that we are to begin holding normalization talks and the Japanese and the North Koreans are to begin holding normalization talks and I think these human rights issues should be very much front and center in both of those normalization dialogues.

**QUESTION:** [Inaudible] ♦ three North Korean teenagers ♦ [Inaudible]

**LEFKOWITZ:** I'm not sure I follow the [inaudible interruption]. If you are referring to the case of the North Koreans who tried to get access to the U.S. Consulate. I think that there has been quite a bit of public confusion about what took place. I'm not sure I'm at liberty to disclose what I understand the facts to be. Obviously some of these people are certainly free to talk about what happened to them on their own. But I don't think I'm at liberty to discuss my understanding of the facts and circumstances.

**QUESTION:** Radio Free Asia. You said there's not much of a bureaucratic hurdle involved in terms of accepting refugees from other countries, but I've talked to several NGO people who work in cases of refugees in China or in Thailand and they say a lot of people, even though they wish to go to America, they have to wait sometimes up to 9 months and in the course of waiting they sort of give up to come to America and go to South Korea which is very quick. If you could comment on that.

**LEFKOWITZ:** Well, I think there are enormous bureaucratic hurdles, I think the questioner before had asked whether there were specific bureaucratic issues in the United States, in terms of our own various departments in the government who have different areas of responsibility - Homeland Security, the State Department obviously, and other agencies who would have an interest in the orderly processing of refugees, and I think we have frankly cleared that up. But there are enormous problems in Asia. There are problems in terms of getting access to these refugees. Many of them are living in hiding. There are problems with whether or not the Chinese will permit access either by other countries or by the United Nations. Once they arrive in other countries there are bureaucratic issues, questions of international law, questions of how other countries treat these individuals. And it is absolutely tragic that we are not able to help move these refugees to genuine freedom much more quickly.

**QUESTION:** You have mentioned China's role in North Korean refugees. Does China have their own reasons on this issue? I want to know, how do you communicate with China to accept the U.S. attitude? Second, you have mentioned exchange program between U.S. and North Korea, I want to know what is obstacle?

**LEFKOWITZ:** On the first question, we have raised the issue of human rights in North Korea with the Chinese at a variety of levels. Staff levels, senior government officials, and indeed at the head of state level. The President raised the issue directly last year. It is not that easy to move the Chinese on this issue. They have their own objectives, their own interests. I think fundamentally, and this is where I think the international scrutiny of the Olympics may well be very effective. I think, ultimately the Chinese have to recognize that coddling the North Korean regime with respect to the mistreatment of its own citizens is not helping the Chinese. There is no advantage for the Chinese government strategically in doing that and certainly reputationally for a country that's about to host the Olympics - I think it's disastrous - but that is something that ultimately the Chinese leaders on their own are going to have to recognize.

With respect to the possibility of some type of exchange program this is something we are thinking about. It's at an early stage. I don't know if there would even be any receptivity to it. But exchange programs are, I think, ultimately a wonderful way to broaden relationships. They don't require stilted government-to-government dialogue, they let real people interact with real people. We saw back in the era of ping-pong diplomacy the way in which athletics can play a role. We saw what happened with the Soviet Union with music and arts exchanges. And I think that there is really an opportunity, if the North Koreans are prepared to have some exchange. I think it would be beneficial for both countries.

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