

Testimony of  
**The Honorable Sam Brownback**

June 21, 2002

Thank you Mr. Chairman. In the interest of time, I would like to ask that my full statement be made a part of the record.

The purpose of this hearing should be clear and its message direct. The North Korean refugee crisis has been neglected for too long, partly because many - including the Chinese government and others - wish it would just go away. As the graphic reports of North Korean asylum bids at foreign embassies show, this problem will only continue to escalate.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, our resolution on North Korea unanimously passed the Senate this week. That resolution expresses four key points that should serve as guiding principles for us in this hearing:

First, forced repatriation of the North Korean refugees constitutes a violation of international law. Therefore, the Chinese government should immediately stop the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees.

Second, the Chinese government should allow the international community to provide open and direct assistance such as medical aid and proper facilities to these North Korean refugees.

Third, the United Nations, with the cooperation of the Chinese Government, should immediately conduct an investigation of the conditions of the North Korean refugees as soon as possible.

And fourth, North Korean refugees should be given legal refugee status in accordance with international law.

Regarding that last point, I am reviewing various legislative options, including one that parallels a law from the early 1990s that helped thousands of Soviet Jews and other persecuted ethnic and religious refugees caught in the breakup of the Soviet Union. I am grateful to many in the refugee advocacy community who have offered their support in helping us craft a bill or an initiative that may similarly help North Korean refugees. These organizations, many of which were involved with the legislation back in 1990, include the Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the South East Asian Resource Action Center, the National Association of Korean Americans, the U.S. Committee on Refugees, and the Project for International Religious Liberty of the Hudson Institute, among others.

Let me also add that my office received word last night that a number of leading refugee advocacy groups are ready to immediately assess assistance needs and relief programs if and when a North Korean refugee processing initiative is started in China. These groups include Doctors Without Borders, which I understand withdrew from North Korea a few years ago, the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, one of the leading groups involved with North Korean refugees, Life Funds for North Korean Refugees based in Japan, the Korean Peninsula Peace Project, and others.

North Korea is today's "killing field" where millions of people considered as politically hostile or agitators - or just being innocent children - starve to death while those in power enjoy luxurious lifestyles, spending billions of dollars on weapons and actively engaging in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Former President Ronald Reagan stated our nation's tradition best when he said: "A hungry child

knows no politics." While every famine is complicated by politics, the North Korean famine is the most complicated politically that many of us have seen in a long time. Politics is killing people. Literally.

How the U.S. and the world community can most effectively express its sympathy and concern for the North Korean people, including refugees in China, is the issue before us today.

If I may, I would also like to warmly welcome our distinguished witnesses, two of whom, Ms. Soon Ok Lee, a North Korean prison camp survivor, and Dr. Norbert Vollertsen, an activist on behalf of North Korean refugees, traveled here from Seoul, South Korea. I would also like to welcome Ms. Helie Lee ("Hay-Lee Lee"), whose recently published memoir about her successful effort to bring her uncle out of North Korea highlights the largely hidden and painful secret among many Korean Americans who still have family members trapped in North Korea and China. I look forward to working with you Mr. Chairman on some legislative vehicle to help the North Korean refugees.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to hearing from the panelists.