

Young Soon KIM
Vice President, Committee for the Democratization of North Korea

September 20, 2011

**Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Health and Human Rights**

Hello, my name is KIM, Young Soon, author of ‘I Was a Friend of Sung Hae Rim’. I am a North Korean defector and a survivor of the North Korean political prison camp, Yoduk (camp #15).

First of all, I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress and related officials of the Congress for giving me a chance to speak at this important venue. I also would like to thank Ms. Suzanne Scholte of the Defense Forum Foundation for her years of friendship and for listening to my story of the North Korean political prison camp.

Camp number 15, Yoduk, where I was incarcerated, is now well known throughout the world. Yoduk Prison Camp was created in July of 1969 under orders of Kim Il Sung, in Yoduk-gun, South Hamkyung Province, in a region known for its rough and mountainous features. It is here that for 30 years people who have incurred the wrath of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il have been sent for the ‘crime’ of being a political prisoner and died silent deaths.

I wrote of my time at Yoduk into a book and titled it ‘I Was a Friend of Sung Hae Rim’. Sung Hae Rim was at one point in my life my friend and also a hidden mistress of Kim Jong-il, and anyone who knew this secret in North Korea were either executed or sent to political prison camps, and I became a victim of this myself and was sent to Yoduk; I want to tell the world about what happened to me and also tell the world about the reality of the North Korean political prison camp system.

Why I was sent to Camp Number 15 (Political Prison Camp)

The Worker’s Party’s establishment of the ‘One Thought Principle’ was instituted whereby the citizens were sent to prison camps for total isolation from general society for the following crimes: the crime of defaming the authority and prestige of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il; the crime of knowledge about the private life of Kim Jong-il and leaking information about it to the general public, thus defaming the prestige of the Great Leader. When I was sent to the prison camp, I had no knowledge about these facts.

Other political crimes that I came to know of after I was incarcerated in the prison camp.

“The crime of talking about a cyst/lump on Kim Il Sung’s neck.”

“The crime of (unwittingly) damaging or soiling the statue or portrait of Kim Il Sung.”

“The crime of knowing about the private life of Kim Jong-il. For example, knowing about Sung Hae Rim being the hidden mistress of Kim Jong-il, and disclosing this information to an outsider.”

“The crime of revealing the birth of Kim Jong Nam, the firstborn son of Kim Jong-il”

“The crime of listening to or viewing foreign radio or TV.”

“The crime of questioning or criticizing the policy of the Worker’s Party.”

“The crime of expressing criticism or complaints about North Korea society.”

I was close friends with Sung Hae Rim, having gone to the same school with her from girl’s high school to college, and one day I heard directly from her that she would be ‘going to the Special Residence #5’; at that time, those in the know knew that ‘Special Residence #5’ meant the residence of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il.

However, at the time I was taken to the political prison camp, I had no idea why I was being incarcerated, and it was only in the summer of 1989 after I was released did I find out the reason why, from a state security agent in Pyongyang. The security agent said the following to me: “Sung Hae Rim was not the wife of Kim Jong-il nor did she bear him a son. These are all groundless rumors. If you mention anything about this again you will not be forgiven.”

Interrogation and life in the political prison camp

On August 1st, 1970, I was forced into a car by state security agents and taken to a secret location where I was interrogated for two months by Unit 312 for preliminary investigation in a state security interrogation room. Under extreme fear for two months, I was told to write my entire life story, and include everything and leave out nothing, and I wrote on and on. IN my writing, I confessed and wrote about Sung Hae Rim coming over to my house and telling me that she would be going to Special Residence #5, and also admitted that people around me knew this information as well.

After the investigations were over, on October 1st, 1970, my entire family and I (7 people total) were sent to Yoduk Political Prison Camp.

- The person who committed the crime was labeled the ‘conspirator/ringleader’ while those taken along for ‘yeon-jwa-jweh’ (guilt by association) were labeled ‘non-principal criminal’ – this was how the criminals were classified.

- We woke up at 3:30 in the morning to go to work by 4:30am, and the labor was from sun up until sun down.

- Meals had to be provided by ourselves, through self-sufficiency.

- I saw countless prisoners contract pellagra, and suffer from diarrhea and die.

- After work was finished, there were daily ‘Fight for Ideology’ meetings.

- Those who were unfortunate enough to be caught by security agents during the ideology meetings and sent away in shackles, were never seen again.
- The forced manual labor was beyond anyone's imagination, and in case of falling short of work goals, the whole group was punished.
- There were so many dead bodies, enough to fill up a field.
- My three sons, one daughter, father and mother, died from starvation; there were no coffins so their bodies were rolled in a straw mat and buried.
- One of my sons, who was 9 years old at the time, drowned to death in Ryongyung River, which is near the prison camp.
- My daughter was given away for adoption, after our release; to this day, I do not know about her whereabouts, whether she is alive or dead.
- My youngest son was publicly executed by firing squad for trying to escape North Korea after his release and attempting to go to South Korea, in 1993 at the age of 23.
- My husband was sent to another political prison camp, a total and complete control zone, in July 4th, 1970, and to this day I do not know whether he is dead or alive.
- From our original family of 8 people, currently only two have survived and successfully escaped from North Korea (myself and another son), the rest of my family, 6 people, have all died.

My older brother, who was the pillar of our family, was a colonel in the North Korean army during the Korean War, in the 3rd Infantry, and while on a mission for the division commander, was killed in battle at the age of 25. Accordingly, our family received favors from Kim Il Sung and lived well until being sent to a political prison camp, and as a result of feeling betrayed, I escaped from North Korea. Even after I was released from Yoduk political prison camp, I was classified as an anti-regime reactionary and suffered under the monitoring by the state security apparatus.

I escaped North Korea on February 1st, 2001, and entered South Korea in November of 2003.

In Conclusion

In the political prison camps of North Korea is a place where the political prisoners will eat anything that 'flies, crawls, grows in the field'.

I wasted 9 years of the prime of my life in that hellhole of a place where even animals will turn their faces away; I lost all my family members, and have lived a life of tears of blood and extreme hardship. Please save the 23 million people in North Korea who are living a life of misery not unlike what I suffered.

Even though I am now over 70 years old, I will fight for the freedom of my people, my countrymen until all my strength is expended. This is the reason why I have lived so far, and also my purpose. In that note I want to deeply thank again the members of the United States Congress for your interest in the human rights situation of North Korea, especially the political prison camps.

Thank you.