

# PERSECUTION



## Image vs. Reality

BEHIND NORTH KOREA'S SELF-GLORIFYING FACADE LIES A DARK REALITY OF TORTURE AND SUFFERING

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APRIL 2024

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A military parade in Pyongyang, North Korea in 2020. Photo by Micha Brändli / Unsplash.

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International Christian Concern

**OUR MISSION:** Since 1996, ICC has served the global persecuted church through a three-pronged approach of advocacy, awareness, and assistance. ICC exists to bandage the wounds of persecuted Christians and to build the church in the toughest parts of the world.

**DONATIONS:** International Christian Concern (ICC) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) (all donations tax-deductible). ICC makes every effort to honor donor wishes in regards to their gifts. Occasionally, a situation will arise where a project is no longer viable. ICC will redirect those donated funds to one of our other funds that is most similar to the donor's original wishes.



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## STAFF

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# Hope for the Hermit Kingdom

In my early years at ICC, I had the unique opportunity of visiting North Korea. During my trip, I was overwhelmed by the obvious oppression taking place and the sense of despair that seemed to hang over citizens' heads like a raincloud.

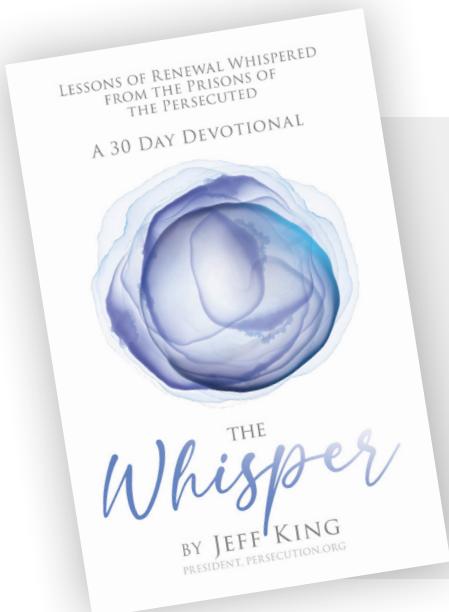
For those suffering under Kim Jong Un's notoriously harsh rule, most of whom have not yet heard the good news of the gospel, life feels utterly hopeless. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in North Korea's prison camps. These poor souls, tens of thousands of them Christians, live out a hellish existence always on the edge of starvation and madness as they suffer at the hands of cruel prison guards.

Through all of the geopolitical issues surrounding North Korea, the oppression ultimately boils down to a spiritual one. In 1907, Pyongyang experienced one of history's greatest revivals and was dubbed the 'Jerusalem of the East' as a result. In the years since, Satan, through the Japanese and the ruling Kim family, has sought to crush the historic release of God's Spirit and to kidnap the bride of the Lord. Satan has worked to extinguish this flame and nearly succeeded. Yet, embers are still flickering within North Korea and may soon turn into a consuming fire which burns down the gates of this great prison.

While the Kim regime certainly has a strong grip on North Korea, we know that the gospel has the power to unravel even the strongest earthly kingdoms. The more I study the so-called "hermit kingdom," the more I believe that its days of oppression are coming to an end.

We long for that day and, in the meantime, we will continue to spread the gospel in North Korea, primarily through radio broadcasts, and meet the needs of defectors who escape. In His timing, God will recapture His bride and I invite you to be part of the magnificent effort to free her. Please join us to bring this vision to life for the imprisoned of North Korea.

**JEFF**



**Jeff King**, President  
International Christian Concern  
Author: *The Last Words of the Martyrs, Islam Uncensored*, and *The Whisper*

OUT  
NOW!

## Discover the Life-Changing Lessons of the Persecuted

ICC President and author Jeff King released his third book, *The Whisper*. In this 30-day devotional, King presents stories of persecuted believers and unpacks their spiritual wisdom as they walk with the Lord through trials and triumphs. How are they able to endure such suffering and remain joyful in the Lord? What lessons can we learn from them?

Visit [www.persecution.org/books](http://www.persecution.org/books)

# ICC Newsroom

YOUR SOURCE FOR PERSECUTION NEWS



*Photo of Du Merci orphans courtesy of Professor Tarfa.*

## Nigerian Government Keeps Christian Orphans Hostage

The 16 Christian children from Du Merci Orphanage will remain in Nigerian custody. The Feb. 16 verdict is the latest decision in a four-year legal battle between Du Merci Orphanage Director, Professor Solomon Tarfa, and the government of Nigeria.

A judge from the Kano State High Court 12 says he has "too many cases to deal with that are more important," refusing to grant Tarfa the children a trial. He urged the parties to settle outside of court, issuing a deadline of June 4, 2024, to "get back to him."

Tarfa has asked Kano State to pay reparations for his illegal imprisonment, false accusations, and the illegal confiscation of his children. The reparations would also cover the costs of rebuilding Du Merci Orphanage, which was demolished by the government, and the cost of rent for Professor Tarfa, his wife, and the released children, who had to relocate to an apartment.

Professor Tarfa continues to demand the release of 16 children who remain in government custody. ICC has documentation that these children continue to face mental and physical abuse, including burns and medical neglect.

Professor Tarfa and his wife, Merci, have suffered a series of tragedies beginning in 2019 when the government falsely arrested him and confiscated 27 of the orphans. Professor Tarfa underwent multiple trials which repeatedly proved his innocence. International Christian Concern (ICC) continues to advocate for and support the Tarfa family.

The government refuses to pay Professor Tarfa for its wrongdoings, escalating the situation before the High Court 12 in Kano State. The judge's latest decision is gravely disappointing, as it pushes the potential release of the 16 children to June, making it more than 4.5 years since the children were first placed in custody.



## Eight Christians Beaten After Church Service

Eight Christians from a local house church in Chhattisgarh, India, were attacked and beaten in the street on their way home from their weekly worship gathering. The attack was predicated on the accusations of forced conversion activities and carried out by the same radical Hindu groups that have been behind many similar incidents.

According to a witness, the mob began harassing the pastor and several of his congregants after they left the service. It quickly escalated and the attackers beat them with sticks and clubs. The pastor sustained the worst injuries to his head and his chest.

## Armenian Christian Prisoner Hakop Gochumyan Trial Result Still Unknown

Armenian Christian Hakop Gochumyan is still being detained in Iran. Last summer Hakop, an Armenian citizen, traveled to Iran to visit his wife Elisa's family, an Iranian-Armenian.

On Aug. 16, they were arrested while visiting their friend's home. Their arrests coincided with arrests of dozens of other Christian converts in Iran. Elisa was held for several months but was released and returned to Armenia with their children. Hakop's trial was scheduled for Jan. 7. His current location and well-being are still unknown.

While Hakop and Elisa live in Armenia and only were visiting family in Iran, Elisa's father, Rafi Shahverdian, was a well-known pastor in Yerevan after fleeing Iran in the 1990s. It is reported that Christian literature was found with them when they were arrested in Iran.

The minority Armenian Christians are given certain protections under the Islamic Republic's legal system. They are, however, forbidden from any proselytizing to Iranian Muslims, and Farsi language Christian literature is banned. Iran is estimated to be holding more than 100 Christians in prison detention by the end of 2023.

## Pakistani Christians No Longer Required to Study Islam in School

The Pakistani government has decided that non-Muslim students will no longer be required to study Islam in school. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training announced earlier this week that a new curriculum will be introduced during the 2024-2025 academic school year, making Islamic studies non-compulsory for Christian students.

The curriculum for Christian students includes a comprehensive study of the Bible, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, core Christian beliefs, Church history, and a study of inspirational Christian figures. Students will also study the influence of Christianity in Pakistan, specifically the ministry of St. Thomas the Apostle and his ministry to South Asia.

Ironically, the curriculum also includes lessons on Christian values like martyrdom. Christian students will learn about heroes of the faith like Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minorities Minister, who was murdered in 2011 after speaking out against persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

This decision is a small win for religious freedom in Pakistan, where Christians are routinely subjected to blasphemy laws, mob violence, and forced marriage and conversion.



# West Watch

ISSUES INVOLVING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

# ICC Spearheads Violations Track at 2024 IRF Summit

BY GARRETT BAIRD, ICC FELLOW

International Christian Concern (ICC) participated in the 2024 International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington, D.C., Jan. 30-31. The IRF Summit, in its fourth year, is designed to create a powerful coalition of organizations that fight for global religious freedom and increase public awareness and political strength for the IRF movement.

More than 1,500 people from 41 countries descended on the nation's capital, and another 1,000 viewed the event online. They came to share their stories of suffering through traumatic ordeals because of their beliefs. They collaborated with relief and advocacy organizations on options for aid and relief, showed persecution trends, and discussed policy. It was two intense days of emotion, anxiety, camaraderie, and fellowship.

Summit co-chairs, former U.S. Ambassador for IRF Sam Brownback and President of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights Katrina Lantos Swett and organizers amassed an impressive array of 167 speakers ranging from members of Congress to survivors of religious persecution abroad.

Each day, representatives from oppressed and marginalized religious communities shared their horrifying stories, sought solidarity, and called attendees to action. Among the many witnesses were the Uyghurs, who conveyed multiple and relentless atrocities and systematic persecution by China, and India's

minority religious communities, who faced oppression and exclusion under arbitrarily applied laws.

Brownback and Swett noted, "...One of the most remarkable and uplifting aspects of the IRF Summits has been watching often adversarial groups advocate for each other: Muslims speaking out against antisemitism, Christians defending the rights of their Muslim brothers and sisters, Secular Humanists advocating for the rights of their religious friends and neighbors, and vice versa. This is the power of freedom of religion, conscience, and belief in action."

Participants saw televised or recorded testimonies from those who could not make the Summit about the imprisonment and mistreatment of faithful people. One brave individual from Latin America recalled chilling tales of persecution while their voice was masked and their face hidden, further highlighting the dire consequences of defying authoritarian regimes. While urgent in their calls for help, these and other witnesses displayed an uncommon strength and resilience bolstered by their hope arising from a deep, observant faith. Summit attendees were in awe of these champions and were inspired to do more.

The Summit offered four different breakout tracks offering several sessions throughout the day to provide participants tailored and in-depth discussions on specific religious persecution topics. The tracks were Vulnerable, Violations, Voices, and Victories. ICC led the Violations track



**IRF Summit**

and a team of two dozen volunteers to plan five sessions with some 30 speakers and panelists. Panelists presented their findings and experiences with governmental and non-governmental assaults on religious freedom. Attendees of the Violations track heard from Ukrainian survivors of Russian occupation and religious oppression, Armenian Christians who faced persecution from Azerbaijan, Nigerian Christians whom Fulani militants attacked because of their beliefs, and Cuban and Nicaraguan advocates raising awareness of the government's escalating pressure on those expressing their faith.

## ICC LEADS THE WAY

ICC's Advocacy team worked with the Family Research Council to lead a Wednesday session, "Violations in Western Democracies." Speakers included Arielle Del Turco, Director for the Center for Religious Liberty, Family Research Council; Andrew P.W. Bennett, Canada's First International Religious Freedom Ambassador, Cardus; Dr. Aaron Edwards, Author, and Theologian; Dr. Paul Teller, Executive Director, Advancing American

Freedom; and Elizabeth Francis, Legal Counsel, Global Religious Freedom, ADF International.

Dr. Edwards shared how he was fired from his job at Cliff College in England because of a tweet that he posted supporting the biblical view of marriage.

"The session comes at a critical time when someone like Professor Edwards is fired his job because of his religious beliefs, or Finnish parliamentarian Päivi Räsänen faces criminal charges for tweeting a Bible verse," said ICC Advocacy Manager McKenna Wendt. "If a member of the Finnish Parliament is standing trial for her faith, what would stop the government from going after an average citizen? The growing intolerance and prosecution of Christian beliefs in Western democracies is unacceptable. We stand committed to defending the right of every Christian to worship freely, on our own soil and around the world."

The Violations in Western Democracies panelists highlighted the growing restriction of religious freedom in supposedly "free" Western democratic societies. From limitations on faith-based expression to discriminatory policies, the fight for religious liberty extends beyond the nations traditionally associated with oppression and is now reaching into democracies once viewed as defenders of freedom of expression.

The other four Violations track breakout sessions were: Religious Freedom Violations in War and Conflict Zones, Violations in Surveillance States, Violations Against Indigenous and Occupied Communities, and Concerning Trends in Latin America.

#### THEMES EMERGE

Several themes resonated throughout the Summit, providing important thought points on the characteristics of religious persecution. Although a wide range of subjects were covered, these were discussed in multiple forums and served

as foundational themes upon which other ideas were deliberated.

First, at the core of religious persecution, as purported by multiple presenters and panelists, is a desire by despotic regimes and tyrannical actors/groups to dehumanize a segment of a population, in this case, people of faith. Through persistent and pervasive repressive measures such as misinformation, degradation of dignity, removal of rights, and separation from society, a victim group can be reduced to people who are less than human and thus not deserving of the same considerations as humans. Once a dehumanization status is obtained, guardrails to persecution and

**"The growing intolerance and prosecution of Christian beliefs in Western democracies is unacceptable. We stand committed to defending the right of every Christian to worship freely, on our own soil and around the world."**

genocide no longer exist, and the subject group can be eradicated.

Second, religious freedom is inextricably tied to freedom of speech, and is a hallmark of a healthy government. The extent to which a nation's people are free to express dissent and offer alternatives to policy is a hallmark of a successful democracy in which citizens can participate. People of faith often find their beliefs in contradiction to a government's policy and, through lawful and peaceful means, try to change it.

Third, and closely tied to the second point, religious freedom was described

by one panelist as "a canary in the coal mine." This means that when religious freedom is extinguished, it often signifies broader societal decay and the erosion of fundamental human rights. The suppression of faith often precedes wider crackdowns on speech, assembly, and other essential freedoms.

During an especially solemn occasion, the Israeli Embassy to the United States, in collaboration with the Philos Project, hosted a closed viewing of unedited footage from Hamas terrorists' body cameras and cell phone footage, and CCTV cameras of the October 7 attack in Israel. For nearly an hour, the room experienced devastating scenes of graphic violence. Images of fear and suffering at the mercy of unbridled evil reduced viewers to tears, bewilderment, and anger. After the viewing, the room was quiet while attendees struggled with their emotions. Even the presenters, who had seen the video multiple times, found it difficult to engage with the crowd. Despite the disturbing content, seeing the video was a necessary reminder that evil is not an abstract, but is rather a tangible force exercised through malevolent actors. This evil is relentlessly meted upon vulnerable religious communities, requiring a strong and effective response drawn from the faith and perseverance given by God.

The IRF Summit served as a platform to bring together the persecuted and advocates to share experiences and work on solutions so that all people can pursue their faith freely and live with dignity. Summit attendees agreed that we all must support organizations providing humanitarian aid and legal help to persecuted groups. We also must advocate for legal actions against regimes and actors that violate religious freedom, hold persecutors accountable, and represent victims of oppression via diplomatic pressure and media attention. We can only dismantle the systems that enable such persecution through sustained, concrete efforts. 



THE CAPITOL DISPATCH  
ADVOCACY ON THE PERSECUTED FRONT LINES  
\* FROM INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN \*

#### ICC UPDATE TO THOSE ON CAPITOL HILL

If you'd like to stay informed about ICC's advocacy work and policy recommendations, subscribe to our monthly newsletter, *The Capitol Dispatch* at [www.persecution.org/icc-advocacy](http://www.persecution.org/icc-advocacy)



# Your Hands and Feet

ICC PROJECTS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR SUPPORTERS



## Standing in the Lord's Strength

### AFRICA

On Oct. 9, al-Shabab attacked Juhudi Village in Lamu West, Kenya – the fifth attack in five months. Six homes were invaded and set on fire. Villagers fled their homes and currently reside in IDP camps where security is guaranteed.

“My husband passed unexpectedly...We were contacted that he had been shot dead by al-Shabab terrorists while heading to Lamu. We were shocked and began to cry. I could not even comfort our two little girls who loved him deeply. This was a great loss to us as a young family and we wished that he could be with us longer. But we strongly believe that the Lord has His plans that cannot be thwarted. He does whatever glorifies him

and what builds us in faith,” said Mary, the wife of Kaingu who was killed by al-Shabab terrorists.

ICC gave emergency aid to ten families left homeless after these attacks, including widows of martyrs. We also supplied school items, including tuition fees, for children wanting to pursue their education.

“We have been praying with strength to cope with this loss and we are seeing Him answer our prayers. We thank you for following up on our case and coming to visit. We also thank you for the food aid and financial assistance you have given to us,” said Mary.



## Revival in a Tea Shop

### MIDDLE EAST

Before ISIS invaded Qaraqosh in 2014, Najeeb was the proud owner of a tea shop. He would go to the shop early in the morning and spend his day there, enjoying life. But when ISIS came, they robbed people of their peaceful life, including Najeeb, his wife, and daughter. He was living displaced for years until he made the brave decision to return, knowing that everything he used to own was likely robbed and destroyed.

"For me, the shop is my life and my whole existence. I want you to help me make it a beautiful shop to welcome people," Najeeb says. Adding "I heard that you help business owners in Qaraqosh to develop their shops. May God bless you," Najeeb says.

ICC helped Najeeb with the funds to reopen his tea shop that was destroyed by ISIS.

"I used to feel defeated when I looked at the tea shop, which represents my entire life. I spent days with both sadness and joy looking at it, wondering if a day would come when I could improve it. That day has come, and the tea shop has become beautiful thanks to you," he said. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart because you revived the dear Tea shop for me."

## ICC Impacts Christian Sanitary Worker in Pakistan

### SOUTH ASIA

Christian sanitary workers for the government in Pakistan were fired without any reason. They haven't been paid since they were unexpectedly fired and many have been forced to take out loans at high interest rates to pay rent and support their families.

In recent months, they have been forced to do odd jobs during the day, but even then, many struggle to make ends meet. ICC helped two Christian families with income to help bear the expenses of their family while they search for jobs. As Christians in Pakistan, it is very difficult to find well-paying jobs that pay enough to support an entire family.

ICC helped one man set up a milk shop to generate income to pay off his debts and support his family.

"I am so thankful for you all. Before, I wasn't sure how I was going to survive without any income. God bless you," he said.



# Front Lines of Ministry

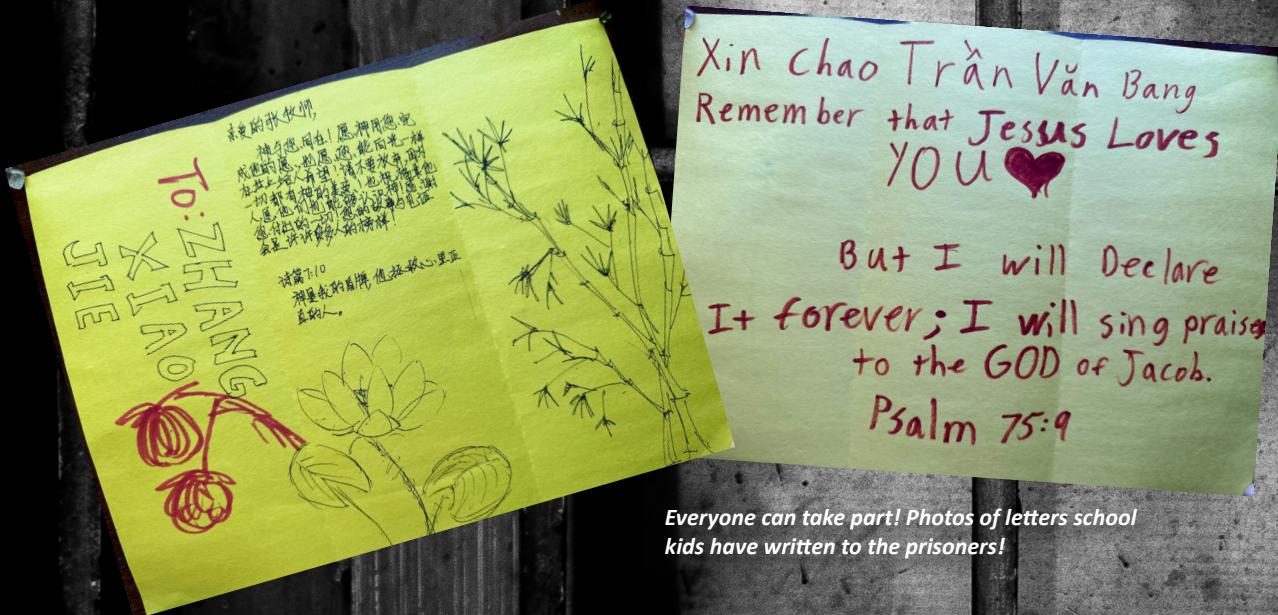
A DEEP DIVE INTO THE LIVES OF CHURCH PLANTERS AND PASTORS

# FAITH BEHIND BARS

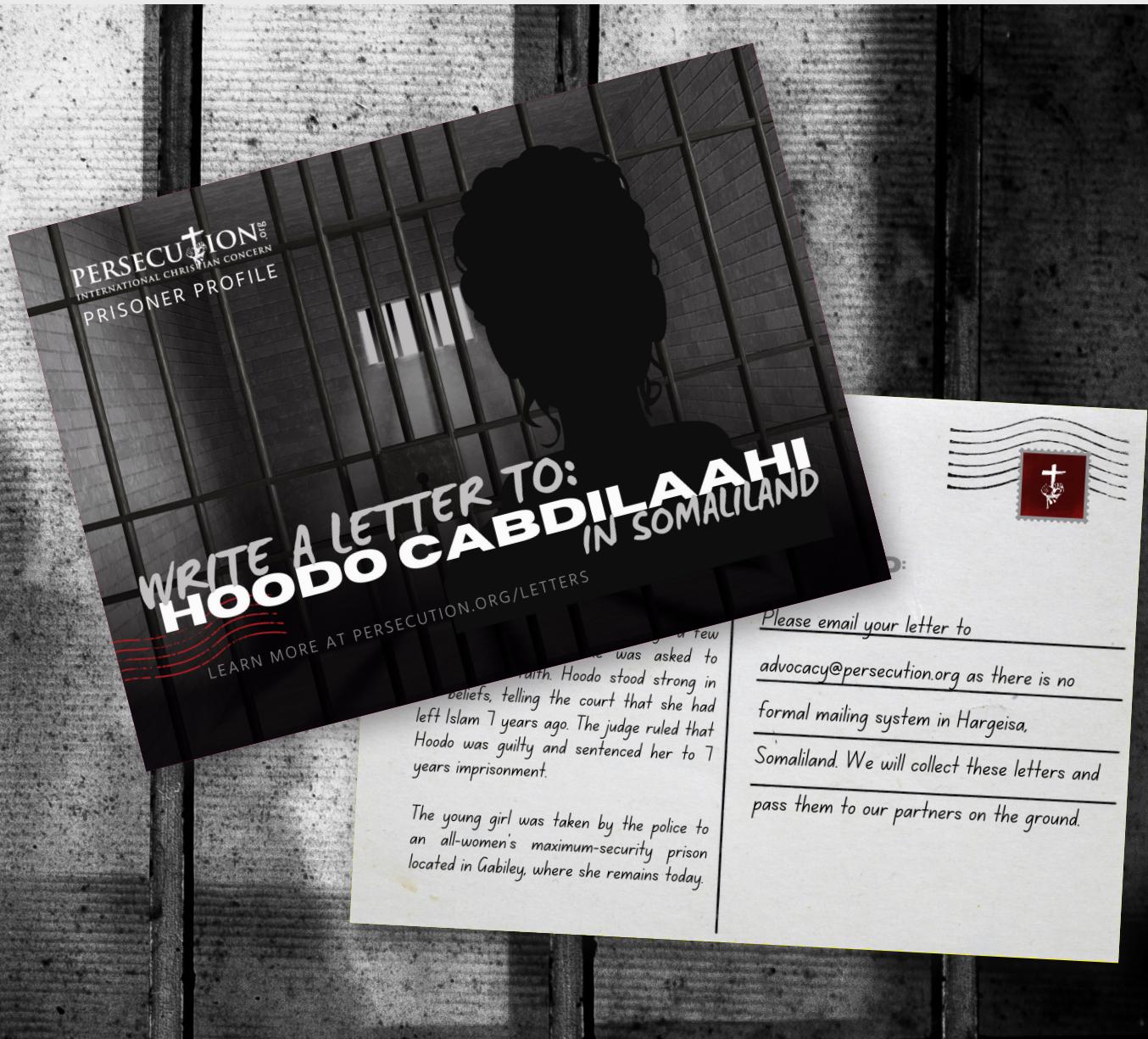
**H**oodo Cabdilaahi is a young, Somali Christian woman who was imprisoned for converting to Christianity. In August 2022, Hoodo was detained after authorities discovered her conversion to Christianity. Hoodo went before a regional judge a few months later, where she was asked to renounce her faith. Hoodo stood strong in her beliefs, telling the court that she had left Islam 7 years ago. Hoodo asked the judge to release her from custody so she could "go home to be with her mother."

The judge ruled that Hoodo had "deliberately and mockingly left the religion of Islam, which is the religion in which she was born" and that the judge has a "great responsibility to protect the religion of Islam." Hoodo was found guilty by the court and was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment.

The young girl was taken by the police to an all-women's maximum-security prison located in Gabley, where she remains today. Since Christians are generally treated worse than other prisoners by both inmates and the prison guards, her safety and well-being is increasingly at risk. While in prison, Hoodo has been physically beaten and is suffering from depression and isolation.



*Everyone can take part! Photos of letters school kids have written to the prisoners!*



## WRITE TO HOODO AND OTHER PRISONERS OF FAITH TODAY!

*You can make a difference for Christians in prison today.*

Through our Prison Letter Writing Campaign, you will have the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in prison for their faith. By sending letters of encouragement and committing to pray for these prisoners, our hope is that these bold and faithful believers would know their brothers and sisters in Christ remember and see their suffering.

***To learn more and download your FREE letter writing packet, visit [www.persecution.org/letters](http://www.persecution.org/letters)***

# THE UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL IN NORTH KOREA

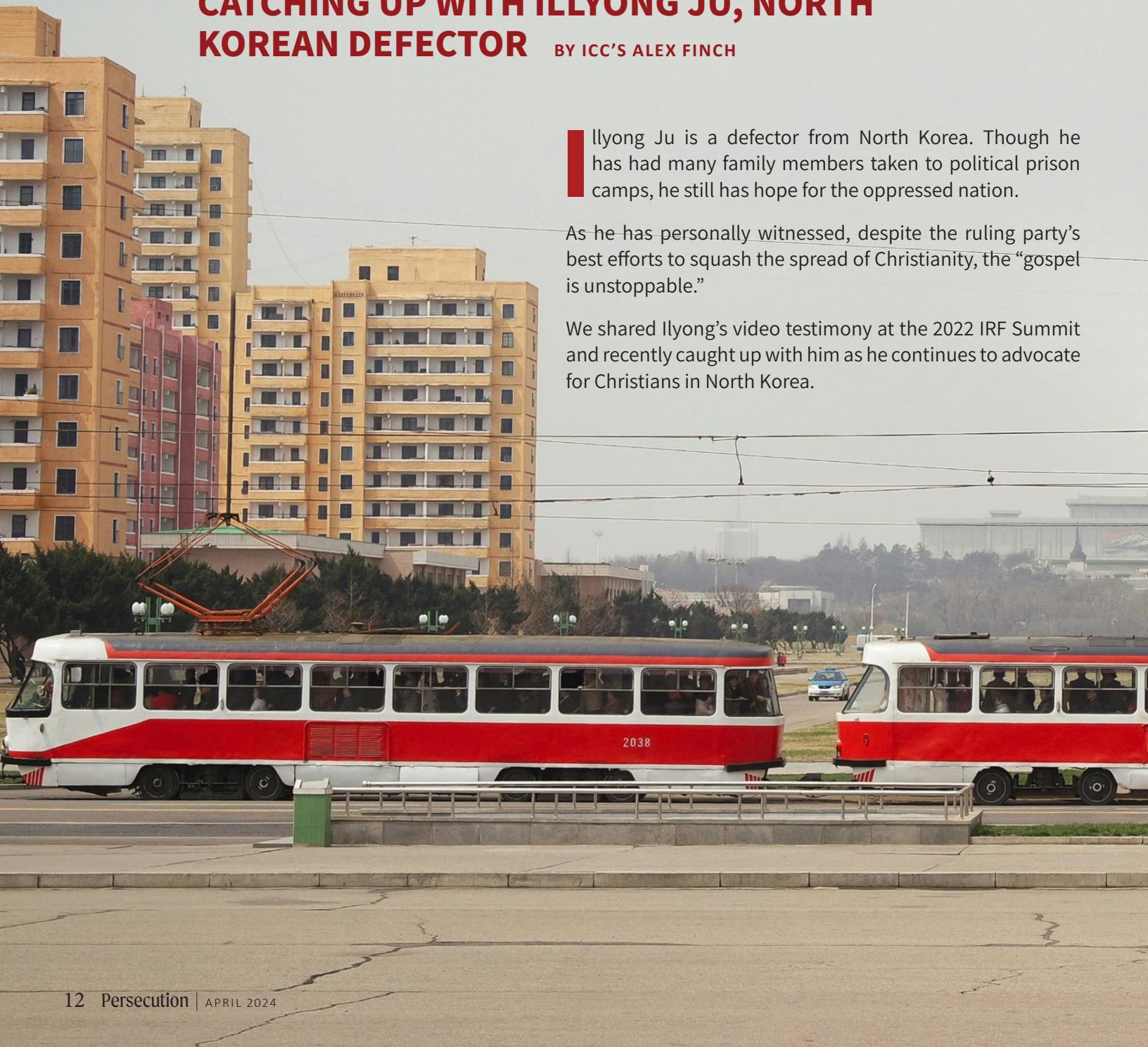
## CATCHING UP WITH ILLYONG JU, NORTH KOREAN DEFECTOR

BY ICC'S ALEX FINCH

Ilyong Ju is a defector from North Korea. Though he has had many family members taken to political prison camps, he still has hope for the oppressed nation.

As he has personally witnessed, despite the ruling party's best efforts to squash the spread of Christianity, the "gospel is unstoppable."

We shared Ilyong's video testimony at the 2022 IRF Summit and recently caught up with him as he continues to advocate for Christians in North Korea.



**Q: We showcased your testimony at the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C. two years ago. Did you receive any attention or pushback from the airing of your story? How did it feel to share your testimony, your family's story, and your thoughts on the North Korea church with believers in the West?**

A: 저의 간증을 Summit에서 공유해 주셔서 감사합니다. 2년 전 Summit 이후로 기독교 관련 온라인 뉴스에 저의 증언 중 일부가 올라가는 것을 보았습니다. 하지만 그것이 저에게 직접적인 피드백으로 돌아오지는 않았습니다.

저는 저의 이야기를 해야 할 의무감을 느낍니다. 왜냐하면 제가 하는 증언이 그동안 잘 알려지지 않은, 북한 주민들이 받고 있는 억압을 세계에 알리는데 기여하면 좋겠다는 마음이 있어서입니다. 또한 저의 이야기와 제 가족의 이야기가 사람들이 북한 주민들에게 관심을 가지는 계기가 되었으면 좋겠습니다. 저의 이야기를 듣게 되는 북한 주민들이 있다면 그들 또한 저의 이야기를 통해 희망을 얻길 바라는 마음에 저는 저의 이야기를 합니다.

국과 세계에 계신 크리스천들에게 저의 간증과 이야기를 전할 때 저는 그들이 북한을 바라볼 때 북한 주민들의 가능성과 그들이 이루어낸 변화, 그 속에서 살아서 일하고 계시는 하나님을 느끼게 해주고 싶었습니다. 북한을 위해, 북한 주민들을 위해 기도하는 사람들이 북한 주민들이 이루어낸 놀라운 변화를 알게 되고, 그 속에서 정말 예배하는 사람들이 있다는 사실과, 실제로 하나님이 그들과 함께하고 계시다는 사실을 알게 된다면 그것은 놀라운 힘을 줄 수 있다고 믿기 때문입니다.



**Listen to Illyong Ju's full testimony video by scanning the QR Code with your mobile device.**



Thank you for sharing my testimony at the Summit. Since the Summit two years ago, I have seen some of my testimonies posted on Christian-related online news. But it didn't come back to me as direct feedback.

I feel an obligation to tell my story. This is because I hope that my testimony will contribute to informing the world of the oppression that North Korean people are suffering, which has not been well known until now. I also hope that my story and that of my family will become an opportunity for people to become interested in the people of North Korea. I tell my story in the hope that if there are North Korean people who hear my story, they too will gain hope through my story.

When I share my testimony and story with Christians in the United States and around the world, I want them to look at North Korea and feel the potential of its people, the changes they have made, and the God who lives and works within them. It would be amazing if those who pray for North Korea and its people became aware of the amazing changes the North Korean people have made, that there are people who really worship, and that God is actually with them. Because I believe it can give you strength.

**Q: What are you hearing right now about the underground church and Christian persecution in North Korea?**

A: 북한 정권의 기독교인에 대한 박해는 여전히 심각합니다. 북한에서 가장 우선순위 박해 대상이 있다면 그것은 첫번째가 기독교인이고 두번째가 대한민국과 소통하고 있는 사람입니다. 북한 주민들이 성경을 보는 순간 주체사상이 거짓 사상이고 북한 정권이 성경을 모방해 생겨난 사이비 집단임을 알게 되기 때문입니다. 그렇기 때문에 북한 정권은 기독교인들을 가장 우선순위로 박해하며 처형도 서슴지 않고 있습니다. 제가 2년 전에 영상에서도 증언 했듯이 저희 고모네 온 가족은 고모부의 할아버지가 기독교인이라는 이유 하나 때문에 전체가 정치범 수용소로 끌려가야 했습니다. 최근에는 기독교인들 뿐만 아니라 주민 전체에 대한 억압이 더욱 심해졌습니다. 북한과 중국 국경에 2중으로 철조망을 쳐놓고 국경을 넘으려는 사람에 대해 사살 명령을 내리고 현재까지 유지중에 있습니다.

The North Korean regime's persecution of Christians is still serious. The highest priority for persecution in North Korea is Christians, and secondly, people communicating

with the Republic of Korea. This is because the moment North Korean residents read the Bible, they realize that the Juche ideology is a false ideology and that the North Korean regime is a pseudo-group created by imitating the Bible. That is why the North Korean regime prioritizes persecution of Christians and does not hesitate to execute them. As I testified in the video two years ago, my aunt's entire family had to be taken to a political prison camp just because her grandfather was a Christian. Recently, oppression not only of Christians, but of the entire population has become more severe. A double barbed wire fence has been erected on the border between North Korea and China, and an order to kill anyone trying to cross the border has been issued and is still in place to this day.

**Q: How do you see the Lord working in and through His Church in North Korea? How has your walk with the Lord grown in the past two years?**

하나님은 북한에 있는 하나님의 자녀들과 놀라운 일을 이루고 계십니다. 우선 몇년 전부터 북한의 장마당(시장)에서 성경책이 복받는 책이라고 불리며 인기가 많아졌다는 제보를 받았습니다. 우리는 북한에 3종류의 기독교인이 있다고 분석하고 있습니다. 첫째는 “그루터기 신앙인”입니다. 그루터기 신앙인이란 북한 정권이 만들어 지기 전부터 예수님을 믿은 사람들로 김일성과 김정일, 김정은의 박해를 피해 숨어서 믿음을 지키고 있는 사람을 말합니다. 그루터기 신앙인들은 오늘 날까지 비밀스럽게 그 자녀들에게 복음을 전하고 있습니다. 두번째는 “외부 영접자”입니다. 탈북을 위해서나 단순 돈을 벌 목적으로 중국을 포함한 제3국에 갔던 북한 주민들이 예수님을 영접하고 다시 북한으로 돌아간 경우입니다. 이들은 강제북송 당해서 돌아갔던지 자신의 의지로 북한으로 파송되어 갔던지 복음을 들고 북한으로 들어가서 믿음을 지키며 제자를 양육하고 있습니다. 세번째는 그루터기 신앙인과 외부 영접자에 의해 예수님을 믿게 된 “내부 영접자”입니다. 내부 영접자는 북한 안에서 예수님을 믿고 그 속에서 열심을 다해 복음을 전하고 있는 사람들입니다. 이 세가지 종류의 기독교인을 통해 북한 안에서는 지금도 놀라운 속도로 복음이 전해지고 있습니다. 하나님께서 바알에게 무릎 끓지 않은 7천명의 의인을 남겨 두셨듯 김씨 우상에게 무릎 끓지 않은 주님의 자녀들을 그곳에 두고 그들과 함께하고 계십니다.

지난 2년간 하나님께서는 계속해서 저와 동행해 주셨습니다. 하나님은 북한에 있는 기독교인들과 함께 일하시며 그들을 위해 일하는 우리를 기뻐하신다고 믿습니다. 최근에는 파akistan으로 단기선교를 가서 하나님의 사랑을 전하고 왔습니다. 하나님은 우리와 함께 하시며 계속해서 우리와 동행하고 계십니다.

God is accomplishing amazing things with His children in North Korea. First of all, I received a report that the Bible has become more popular in markets in North Korea a few years ago, being called a book of blessings. We analyze that there are three types of Christians in North Korea.

The first is the “stump believer.” Stump believers are people who believed in Jesus even before the North Korean regime was created and are hiding and maintaining their faith to avoid persecution by Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. Stump believers continue to secretly preach the gospel to their children to this day.

The second is “outside recipients.” This is a case where North Korean residents who went to a third country, including China, to escape from North Korea or simply to make money accepted Jesus and returned to North Korea. Whether they were forcibly repatriated to North Korea or were sent there of their own volition, they entered North Korea with the gospel and are maintaining their faith and raising disciples.

The third are “internal acceptors” who came to believe in Jesus through external acceptors. Internally accepted people are people who believe in Jesus in North Korea and are passionately spreading the gospel there. The gospel is still being spread at an astonishing rate in North Korea through these three types of Christians. Just as God left behind the 7,000 righteous people who did not kneel to Baal, God leaves His children who did not kneel to Kim’s idols and is with them.

God has continued to walk with me over the past two years. We believe that God is pleased with us working with and for Christians in North Korea. Recently, I went on a short-term mission trip to South Asia to spread God’s love. God is with us and continues to walk with us.

**Q: We heard about Christian refugees in China that were bused back to North Korea last year for repatriation. Can you provide any insights into those reports?**





맞습니다. 중국에 머물던 북한 주민 6백명이 작년 말에 중국 정부에 의해 기습적으로 북한으로 강제북송 되었습니다. UN 인권이사회 이사국인 중국이 북한 정권의 살인 행위에 동조한 사실을 매우 안타깝게 생각하고 있습니다. 최근 들은 소식에 의하면, 강제북송 된 600명에 대한 매우 강도 높은 취조가 이루어지고 있다고 들었습니다. 그리고 아직 북송되지 않은 남은 1천여 명에 대한 정보까지 미리 자백하도록 강요하고 있다고 합니다. 이들은 분명 수용소에서 고문을 당하고 일부는 처형을 당하게 될 것입니다. 이 사실을 우리는 절대로 가볍게 넘어가서는 안됩니다. 북한 정권은 자국민에 대한 대량 학살에 벼금가는 행위를 지속적으로 하고 있고, 중국 정부는 이것을 묵인하고 암묵적으로 동조하고 있습니다.

강제북송된 주민들에 대해 저는 매우 안타깝게 생각합니다. 하지만 하나님은 이 사건을 통해 하나님의 일을 하고 계신 줄 믿습니다. 강제북송 된 600명 중에는 분명 예수님을 믿는 사람들이 있을 것입니다. 이들은 가는 곳이 어디던지 가는 곳마다 복음을 전할 것입니다. 저와 함께 일하는 김OO 자매가 강제북송으로 북한 감옥에 있을 때 8명을 전도했던 것처럼 말입니다. 따라서 우리는 강제북송 된 600명이 오히려 북한 정권의 억압을 대항하여 일어나는 놀라운 하나님의 사람들될 것이라는 믿음을 갖고 있습니다.

That's right – 600 North Korean residents in China were forcibly repatriated to North Korea in a surprise move by the Chinese government at the end of last year. We find it very unfortunate that China, a member of the UN Human Rights Council, sympathized with the North Korean regime's murderous actions.

According to recent news, I heard that very intensive interrogation is being conducted on the 600 people who were forcibly repatriated to North Korea. And it is said that they are forcing them to confess in advance information about the remaining 1,000 people who have not yet been repatriated to North Korea. They will undoubtedly be tortured in camps and some will be executed. We should never take this fact lightly. The North Korean regime continues to commit acts tantamount to genocide against its own people, and the Chinese government is turning a blind eye to this and tacitly going along with it.

I feel very sorry for the residents who were forcibly repatriated to North Korea. However, I believe that God is doing His work through this incident. Among the 600 people who were forcibly repatriated to North Korea,

there must be people who believe in Jesus. They will spread the gospel wherever they go. Just like Sister Kim, who works with me, evangelized to eight people while she was in a North Korean prison due to forced repatriation. Therefore, we have faith that the 600 people who were forcibly repatriated to North Korea will become amazing people of God who rise up against the oppression of the North Korean regime.

**Q: How is life for you these days? What are you up to?**

저의 원래 계획은 올해 상반기에 박사학위 취득을 위해 미국으로 유학가는 것이었습니다. 하지만 저는 지금 당장 북한 주민들을 위해 일하고 싶은 마음이 더 커서 박사 학위 취득은 잠시 보류하고 북한 선교를 위해 일하기로 결정했습니다. 현재는 한국에서 북한 선교를 좀 더 체계적으로 하기 위해 단체를 만들어 노력하고 있습니다.

My original plan was to study abroad in the United States to obtain a doctoral degree in the first half of this year. However, I have a greater desire to work for the North Korean people right now, so I decided to put my doctoral degree on hold and work for North Korean missions. Currently, we are working to form an organization to conduct missionary work to North Korea more systematically in South Korea.

**Q: What message would you still like to share with Westerners?**

저의 메시지는 늘 같습니다. 북한 정권의 강한 억압에도 불구하고 북한 주민들은 장마당의 발전이라는 놀라운 승리를 이루어냈습니다. 장마당의 발전을 통해 북한 주민들은 정권이 아닌 시장에 의존해 살아가게 되었습니다. 이것은 정권의 주민들에 대한 통제력을 약하게 만들었고, 주민들의 정권 의존도를 완전히 낮췄습니다. 그리고 시장을 통해 성장한 일명 '장마당 세대'는 정권에 대한 미움이 오히려 더 많은 북한의 2030세대입니다. 이들은 북한 밖 세계를 향해 눈을 돌리고 있으며 그것은 복음을 전하기 가장 좋은 통로가 됩니다. 특히

지금 북한에서 시장을 통해 새롭게 등장한 신흥 자본가 계급인 일명 '돈주'는 정권에 대한 영향력까지 갖고 있습니다. 장마당 세대와 돈주를 활용한다면 북한 복음 전파의 통로가 활짝 열릴 것입니다. 그 사이에서 소통의 역할을 담당하고 있는 것이 바로 탈북민들입니다. 탈북민을 통해 지금 북한에 복음을 전할 수 있습니다. 저희와 함께 해주세요! 우리는 예수님만이 유일한 왕이 되신 하나님의 한반도를 꿈꿉니다. 그래서 우리가 하는 일을 One king one korea movement라고 합니다.

My message is always the same. Despite the North Korean regime's strong oppression, North Korean people achieved an amazing victory in the development of the marketplace. Through the development of the marketplace, North Korean residents have come to depend on the market rather than the government.

This weakened the regime's control over the population and completely reduced their dependence on the regime. And the so-called 'Jangmadang generation,' who grew up through the market, is North Korea's generation in their 20s and 30s, with a greater hatred for the regime. They are turning their eyes to the world outside of North Korea, which is the best channel for spreading the gospel.

In particular, the so-called 'donju,' an emerging capitalist class that has emerged through the market in North Korea, even has influence over the regime. If we utilize the marketplace households and donju, the channels for spreading the gospel in North Korea will be wide open.

It is North Korean defectors who play the role of communication between them. We can now spread the gospel to North Korea through North Korean defectors. Please join us! We dream of one Korean peninsula where Jesus is the only king. So what we do is called One king one Korea movement. 

# North Korea's Fiery Furnace

*As the world's worst police state, North Korea crushes dissent and free expression by creating a web of control*

BY ICC'S SOUTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL TEAM

North Korea's (DPRK) hatred of Christianity has condemned hundreds of thousands of Christians to death and left remaining believers fearful and hiding in the shadows. The DPRK's treatment of Christians is only one part of a system of state control that "is not comparable to any other nation in the world," according to Todd Krainin's book, "I Escaped a North Korean Prison Camp." As the world's worst police state, North Korea crushes dissent and free expression by creating a web of control fashioned with three cords: songbun, the police state, and gulags.

## SONGBUN

Songbun is a unique social classification system that the North Korean regime uses to segment society into three levels of loyalty to the regime: core, wavering, and hostile, based on a citizen's ancestral and personal loyalty to the state. Any perceived disloyalty automatically eliminates the opportunity to reach the highest songbun known as core.

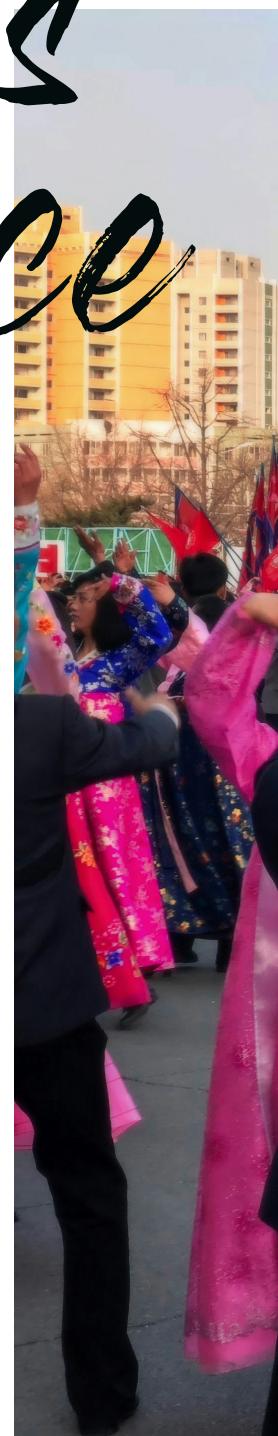
Despite his personal loyalty, one man describes in a 2014 Telegraph article how he received a 'hostile' songbun because his father "unintentionally soiled an image of Kim Jong Il." As a result, his family would face "decades of harsh official discrimination" since hostiles are

the lowest class.

Because the state is constantly propagating the message that its leaders are demigods, it is especially hostile toward Christianity as it offers a competing religious system and also exposes the citizenry to the religious source that the state has counterfeited.

Of the many defectors and experts we interviewed, we heard that the majority of Christians are probably killed outright when captured, with the percentage possibly as high as 70%. Those not killed outright are thrown into the fiery furnace (the gulag) never to return.

To achieve a middle or high standard of living, North Koreans must be classified as 'core' or 'wavering.' The state then determines what services and goods it provides to people based on their songbun. For example, employment opportunities, access to social welfare and food, housing, etc. are more plentiful for the core class, spotty for the wavering class, and virtually nonexistent for the hostile class. According to Jieun Baek, without government provisions, wavering and hostile class members only make \$3-\$5 per month "and must participate in criminalized market activity to survive." Increased black market activity then increases the likelihood of arrest.





*Photo: A mass-dance to celebrate the passing of late DPRK leader, Kim Jong Il.*

## DIVE DEEPER INTO NORTH KOREA

ICC's extensive 2024 Persecutor of the Year report highlights North Korea and Kim Jong Un. Download your copy today at [www.persecution.org/poy](http://www.persecution.org/poy)



Satellite imagery shows prison camps, called gulags, in North Korea. The regime has denied the existence of these compounds, despite the satellite images.

## POLICE STATE

The undergirding of songbun is a massive state intelligence operation that constantly monitors all citizens according to David Hawk, an expert on human rights in North Korea. Hawk told ICC, “[The DPRK] was always watching what we were saying, watching what we were doing.” Another defector ICC interviewed mentioned the phrase used by citizens to sum up living under the eyes of the police state: “The walls have ears and the fields have eyes.”

Public safety police watch and respond to criminal behavior while the state security police monitor political behavior, similar to the Gestapo, according to Hawk. Citizens are “in constant fear and anxiety” of being arrested.

What’s worse, the DPRK forces citizens to spy on each other and report suspicious behavior to police. Citizens must join in-min-ban neighborhood watch teams that regularly report their neighborhood’s political culture to state leaders, including details like spending patterns and the number of “chopsticks and spoons in every house” according to North Korea News.

Thanks to the police state and in-min-ban, many Christians hide their faith from family and friends and avoid worship with any other Christians because Christians are terrified of arrest. A USCIRF report states that most North Koreans “have never witnessed any religious activity.” According to one North Korean, “There are churches...[but they are] built only for foreigners to attend.”

## GULAGS

“I was within hours of death; sick, malnourished and frozen from the deplorable conditions of the prison cell,” recalls former prisoner Hea Woo. “I didn’t think I would ever see the outside of the prison cell.”

Woo and others who are arrested are sentenced to the gulags; massive labor camps loosely based on Stalin’s prison system, where prisoners suffer horrific treatment. While the DPRK denies their existence, satellite images and former prisoners’ testimonies have lifted the veil over the camps to unveil a hellish world.

North Korea operates four types of gulags. The kwan-li-so, similar to Nazi concentration camps, holds political prisoners without a “charge, let alone a trial, many of them for knowing someone who has fallen out of favor,” Amnesty International reports. The kyo-hwa-so camp is a long-term prison for convicted felons who have committed criminal acts and gone through the judicial process. A jip-kyul-so camp is a short-term, hard labor gulag with high death rates for misdemeanor political and criminal offenders. Finally, the ro-dong-ryon-dae gulag is a mobile labor brigade reserved primarily for

repatriated North Koreans sent back from China.

Torture and starvation define North Korean gulags. Located in remote mountains with extremely tight security, escape is almost impossible. Prisoners live on the edge of starvation, yet the system demands that prisoners farm, manufacture, raise animals, and do heavy mining and lumber harvesting. In an Amnesty International report, a former guard named Mr. Lee described how women regularly “servic[ed]” prison officials and then “disappeared...because the secret could not get out.”

Within the gulag, no one is protected from brutality. Not even children. A CNN article tells of a woman near starvation, who gave birth to her baby in prison despite the rules against pregnancy. A guard heard the baby’s cries and beat the mother. She begged the guard to let her keep the newborn, but he continued to beat her...and then he forced her to hold her new baby face down underwater until the baby died.

Eventually, prisoners become desensitized to death. In the same CNN article one prison camp survivor said, “Because we saw so many people die, we became so used to it. I’m sorry to say that we became so used to it that we didn’t feel anything.”



North Korea propaganda surrounds citizens throughout their entire lives. Creative Commons photo from Flickr.

### TINSEL STATUE

DPRK’s web of control would make Stalin, Hitler, and Mao envious. One defector and former prisoner of a DPRK gulag, in speaking with ICC’s president, was asked if he had read “The Gulag Archipelago” by Alexander Solzenitzyn (the seminal and horrifying history of the Soviet gulag system); he told him that he had, but that DPRK’s system was infinitely worse!

The totally insular culture of DPRK, its people density, and the fact that all citizens share the same culture and language magnify the efficiency and effectiveness of the police state.

The state uses the songbun system, the intelligence agencies, and the gulags, to spy on, arrest, torture, and strangle any threat to its ideology or supremacy.

Much like Nebuchadnezzar and all false tyrannical systems that listen to and mimic the beast, the state demands that all its citizens, but especially Christians, must bow before its tinsel statue. Those that won’t are thrown into the fiery furnace. But unlike Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, precious few escape the state’s wrath. <sup>†</sup>



# FREE NORTH KOREA RADIO

A DARING ACT OF DEFIANCE AGAINST TYRANNY



**I**n the shadow of the world's most repressive regime, a radio wave of hope pierces the hearts and minds of those living in the darkness of oppression. Free North Korea Radio (FNKR), in partnership with ICC, is leading a transformative mission to bring the gospel and the hope of Jesus to the enslaved people of North Korea through radio broadcast.

Every morning and evening for two hours, broadcasts pierce through the veil of censorship, reaching the isolated corners of North Korea with messages of faith and redemption from defectors, songs of praise, and more. These broadcasts, carefully tailored for the North Korean audience, offer a lifeline of spiritual nourishment in a land where their leaders have made themselves out to be gods.

#### MORE THAN SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

Recognizing the immense challenge of reaching a population isolated from the outside world, FNKR employs innovative methods to deliver the gospel.

## PRAYER REQUEST

Please pray for the brave believers in North Korea. Pray for our team to creatively get the Bible and gospel into the hands and hearts of North Koreans. Pray for the success of Free North Korea Radio as they work to bring the gospel to the hermit kingdom.

## Help Us Send the Gospel into North Korea

We are raising \$40,000 this month to bolster our radio programming and broadcasts, and support our team ministering to those in North Korea.

Will you prayerfully consider making a generous gift to help this project, and countless others that we are planning for the coming year?

Scan the QR Code with your mobile device or visit [www.persecution.org/give](http://www.persecution.org/give) to give today!





# “I Am the Worst”

A PRAYER FOR THE OPPRESSORS

INTRODUCING

## “I Am the Worst”

“I am the worst” is how the Apostle Paul described himself to his young protégé, Timothy. Paul said he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man who had Christians put into prison and killed. Yet the greatest apostle met Jesus on a road to Damascus.

*“I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief,”* wrote Paul. *“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:14).”*

If the Lord can change Paul’s heart, he can work in the lives of any oppressor. While we see daily the evil atrocities committed by persecutors, we know that they, like Paul, are deceived and act in unbelief. The Lord knows their hearts, and draws them to himself in many ways, for he wants everyone to put their faith in Christ and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He calls us to pray for our enemies, our oppressors.



## THIS MONTH: FULANI MILITANTS

This month, we lift in prayer the militant Fulani leaders who are creating havoc in the Middle Belt in Nigeria. They are deceived by the lies and radical elements of Islam, controlled by the adversary, and have killed tens of thousands of Christians for decades. Yet the Lord created and loves them and is drawing them to himself. We pray for Fulani militants to discover the truth in Christ and be drawn, like Paul, to him as only Jesus can do.

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom *I am the worst*. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17



# Crowns of Courage

HIGHLIGHTING THOSE WHO HAVE SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST

# SERVING THE LORD IN TEMPORARY BODIES

**F**or those who choose to work and serve in modern Afghanistan, there is no mystery as to the severe risks involved. Yet for many brave believers, the importance of their mission far outweighs the dangers.

This was the case for Gayle Williams, a 34-year-old aid worker with SERVE Afghanistan of British and South African nationality.

Leading up to her work in Afghanistan, Williams worked in Pakistan, serving displaced Afghans living in refugee camps. As her love for the Afghan people deepened, she persevered in her journey to serve in-country and eventually made her way to southern Afghanistan in 2006.

Here, surrounded by Taliban violence, she humbly served disabled children and those who had been injured in the conflict. While SERVE Afghanistan is Christian in its beliefs, it was not evangelistic in nature, focusing more on tangible relief projects than gospel outreach. Williams' colleagues recalled that she was personally very cautious not to openly share her faith with Afghans.

Yet, despite its efforts to keep a low profile, SERVE Afghanistan still attracted the attention of local Taliban militants. Their targeted violence against the organization and other Christian groups sought to deter aid workers from the region and undermine the government's security efforts.

Shortly before her own death, Williams grieved at the funeral of a colleague. Here, she told a friend that she hoped to be buried in the same Christian cemetery in Kabul and said, "These bodies are only temporary. When I get to heaven, I will have a new body."

Sure enough, only a few weeks later on October 20, 2008, Taliban militants fatally shot Williams as she walked down a quiet street in the capital city of Kabul.



© PA

The Taliban claimed responsibility immediately for the attack. "This woman came to Afghanistan to teach Christianity to the people of Afghanistan," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told The Associated Press. "Our [leaders] issued a decree to kill this woman. This morning our people killed her in Kabul."

Around the world, family, friends, and world leaders grieved the senseless murder. Coming down harshly on the attack, the UK Secretary of State for International Development said, "Her killing was a callous and cowardly act by people who would take Afghanistan back to the dark days of the Taliban

tyranny which scarred the country for so long."

Perhaps most touching, Gayle's sister Karen expressed that she and her family had forgiven the assailants because they knew Gayle would have done the same.

While the work in Afghanistan remains perilous, hope is not lost. As long as there are brave men and women like Gayle Williams bringing light into the darkness, the gospel will continue touching hearts in the most difficult places on earth. 





We'd love to hear from you!

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ICC  
PO BOX 8056  
SILVER SPRING, MD 20907

OR ONLINE AT  
[WWW.PERSECUTION.ORG](http://WWW.PERSECUTION.ORG)

OR BY PHONE  
800-ICC-5441

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Provide now for a future gift to ICC by including a bequest provision in your will or revocable trust. If you would like more information on giving to ICC in this way, please give us a call at 1-800-ICC-5441.

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A busy train at Kaeson Metro Station, Pyongyang. Photo by Thomas Evans, Unsplash

