

Prisoners



There are 50,000 to 70,000 Christians currently detained in prison camps; about 15% of North Korea's 400,000 believers. Christians face brutal persecution if their faith is discovered and may be beaten, arrested, tortured or killed.

North Koreans can be imprisoned for virtually any state-defined crime, such as being a Christian, making a negative comment about the regime, failing to have a picture of Kim Il Sung in their house or failing to keep it clean enough, and travelling to China to look for food.

Punishment is not limited to the offender, but to three generations of the offender's family, and exposes them to severe violations of human rights that occur throughout the North Korean criminal system, such as systematic use of torture, executions, use of humans for weapons research and testing.

There are eight political prison camps which hold between half a million and a million people. Political prisoners are kept under constant threat of execution. There are 30 other camps which contain hundreds of thousands of North Koreans who are forced to work every day.

Two of the camps are together known to cover the same area as the Isle of Wight. In the last 30 years over 500,000 people are believed to have perished in North Korea's huge network of jails, prison camps and underground secret construction projects.

The food shortage combined with the hard labour required of prisoners means they die from starvation and from being overworked. Those who survive do so by eating any animal they can find, such as snakes and rats.

*May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die. **Psalm 79: 11***

A picture of Kim Il Sung



Please pray

- » For those being detained and tortured in North Korea's eight prison camps, and that the prison authorities will have compassion and stop the torture, beatings, forced abortions and other cruel treatment
- » For the protection of women prisoners from rape, and for healing and restoration for those who have already been assaulted by guards or other inmates
- » That those imprisoned in China will be freed without getting deported back to North Korea
- » For prisoners who dare to share the Gospel openly.



Open Doors NORTH KOREA PRAYER CARDS

Please use this guide as you intercede on behalf of North Korean refugees, China's authorities and North Korea in general.

Life in North Korea

North Korea is an oppressive and totalitarian nation with no tolerance of any kind of dissent or discussion of political and economic issues. Its 23.8 million people are strictly controlled in terms of freedom of movement, assembly and association.

Famine, poverty and persecution drive North Koreans to flee to China, despite the risks of being caught and repatriated. Police in both countries invest heavily in manpower and resources to arrest refugees and those helping them.

Politics

Kim Jong-il's communist dictatorship isolates the population from the wider world and indoctrinates its ideology through education

and culture. Kim Il Sung, the deceased father of Kim Jong-il, has been exalted and revered as a god to be followed with obedience.

Religion

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but in reality genuine religious activity is prohibited and Christians are considered a threat to the regime. The Bible is banned. Most North Koreans have never heard about Jesus or seen a church.

Famine

Food prices have increased and although the weather was better in 2008, food production dropped for the third year in a row. Between 2 to 4 million people have starved to death since 1995 and in the year ahead, 8.7 million will need food aid. It is reported that food aid does not reach the people but is diverted to the military and the elite. Many survive on grass, roots and goods sold on the black market. Refugees report cannibalism.

Infant mortality and malnutrition rates are extremely high.

*Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. **Habakkuk 1:5***

Please pray

- » That God will reveal Himself to Kim Jong-il and his government
- » That the Church will emerge strong after years of persecution
- » That Kim Jong-il will lose his power over the minds of the people, and that they will be liberated from psychological bondage
- » For new leaders to emerge who fear God and love North Koreans.

Two North Korean school children



Refugees



Estimates suggest between 100,000 and 300,000 North Korean refugees are hiding in China. Some left in search of food or jobs to support starving families; others want freedom and a better life.

China's role

When North Koreans cross the Tumen River where it is shallow or frozen to reach China, this does not mean freedom; China has an agreement with North Korea to forcibly repatriate all refugees. Since leaving North Korea is a capital offence, China's policy potentially means sending refugees to their death.

In North Korea returned refugees are brutally interrogated; if they admit to attending a church or having contact with religious organisations doing humanitarian work in the border area, they will be severely punished, even executed.

China is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Convention requires China to grant access to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the border area where most refugees are in hiding, and also to allow the UNHCR a role in determining the status of the refugees. China's government refuses, calling the refugees 'economic migrants'.

China's police actively seek North Korean refugees and assist with interrogating, beating and imprisoning them.

Since it is unsafe for refugees to remain in China, they aim to reach South Korea or another country which will grant them refugee status. Sadly while in China, with no legal rights, 70 per cent of North Korean women refugees end up being forced into brothels, sold as sex slaves or wives.

*Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees.... The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. **Isaiah 16:3-4***

North Korean soldier at the border between North Korea and China



Please pray

- » That China will allow the UNHCR to have access to North Korean refugees and stop forced repatriation.
- » For the thousands of refugees already in China or planning their escape from North Korea
- » For those being used for slave labour and sexual exploitation
- » That God will soften the hearts of those who exploit and enslave
- » For the physical, psychological and spiritual health of refugees.

Religious liberty



North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, was once known as the 'Jerusalem of the East'. In 1945, 13 per cent of the population were Christian. Between 1945 and 1950, the North Korean government executed or arrested all of the country's religious leaders. All religious families were relocated to industrial cities on the east coast or sent to forced labour camps.

Religious freedom

Despite virtually no freedom of religion, there are four 'show' churches in Pyongyang to demonstrate to tourists that there is freedom of religion. North Koreans must receive permission to attend these churches.

North Koreans are exposed to intensive and continuous anti-religious propaganda. Penalties for being caught practising religion or with religious materials include public execution, torture or imprisonment in gulags where believers are forced to perform hard labour and given less than subsistence levels of food.

*You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. **Jeremiah 15:15***

Please pray

- » For religious freedom for all North Koreans
- » That the grip of Juche over the North Korean people will end
- » That God will protect the minds and hearts of children facing relentless indoctrination
- » That the Gospel will be able to penetrate every part of the country, and that every North Korean will have the chance to hear and know the truth
- » For the perseverance and boldness of North Korean believers to share their faith.

Religious assembly

Despite the difficulties there is evidence to suggest that the church is alive and growing in North Korea. The famine triggered refugee movement between China and North Korea, allowing Christianity to spread. Christians still meet together to worship, but the chance of being betrayed is significant so believers are careful. They often do not even tell their own children about their faith or the secret meetings, because children are encouraged at school to betray their parents.

The official religious system

Kim Il Sung created a personality cult mimicking Japanese 'emperor worship' called Juche or 'Kimilsungism'. It twists the Holy Trinity of Christianity by teaching that Kim Il Sung is god, his son Kim Jong-il is the Christ figure, and the ideology of Juche replaces the Holy Spirit. North Koreans are indoctrinated with this belief system from the cradle to the grave.



The latest 'show' church in Pyongyang