

Transcript of the Oral Statement

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Chairman Smith and the distinguished members of the Subcommittee, first of all, on behalf of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies an independent research think-tank, based in Seoul, Republic of Korea, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify about human rights in North Korea's nuclear program. I already submitted 10 page written statement to this subcommittee. May I just summarize my written statement? The story I am going to tell you is about human rights abuses which occurred at two nuclear facilities in North Korea. One is the Pyongsan uranium mine, a resource for the front-end fuel cycle in North Korea's nuclear program and the other is the Radiochemical Laboratory, a reprocessing facility located at Yongbyon, a significant resource for the back-end fuel cycle.

In the Pyongsan uranium mine, the workers were placed under miserable and inhuman work conditions, comparable to those in the conventional mines where the prisoners in the Ordinary prison camps worked, as detailed in the UN COI report. High quality food was well distributed to the workers of the uranium mine unlike the workers in the mines of the Ordinary prison camps, because the nuclear program has always been placed on the top priority. They were also forced to work for seven hours almost every day of the week and had only one day off in a month. They were subject to inhuman treatments including beatings. They were conducted mainly inside the underground mine with supervisor's intentional oversight and they were beaten by metallic tools inside the mine, which terrified the workers much more than outside the mine.

Moreover, I heard clear statements from the defector that little consideration was given to work safety. For instance, the interviewee recalled that he never witnessed any ventilation system that diluted the concentration of Radon, a radionuclide from the uranium ore. And he also said that the quality of the anti-dust mask distributed to the workers was so bad that the workers inside the underground mine did not even carry them. Since the inhalation of uranium ore dust which consists of radon is known as a major cause of lung cancer, no anti-dust mask during work hours means that they were directly exposed to occupational diseases. Working for seven hours a day may be considered not so bad, but the work was extremely stressful and intense because of the increasing number of sick workers particularly with skin diseases in his unit. During certain periods of time, he witnessed that only half of the unit members were available for work. The lack of available workers created a heavier and more intense workload, because of the onerous allocation of daily work quotas.

We interviewed another defector who worked at the Yongbyon Radiochemical Laboratory that was concluded during inspections by the IAEA to be a reprocessing facility. He was an analyst of the concentration of high levels of radioactive chemicals. As he and his colleagues

dealt with high-levels of radiological substances and wastes, they carried the film badges (dosimeters) which gauged the radiation dose in the workplace. However, the badges were monitored only once every three months and the workers were never informed of the results of these monitoring tests, unless severe symptoms of radiation sickness were present and visibly apparent. Interestingly, he had a group of colleagues whose work duties included helping other workers shake off their fatigue and sleepiness during working hours. In addition, according to his testimony, the fertility of the women laborers was very low. For instance, in his department, 60% out of a total of fifty workers were women, but most of the women who got married could not conceive children while working at the factory. The interviewee witnessed many workers who suffered from nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and fevers at the workplace.

To make matters worse, North Korea as a rigid totalitarian regime controlled the flow of any sensitive information especially between the workers in its nuclear facilities. This hampers the voluntary and bottom-up development of safety and security culture among the workers in the nuclear and uranium mining facilities. In addition, since North Korea left the NPT and the IAEA in early 1990s, the workers could not update internationally accepted safety standards and work conditions for the past 20 years. Human factors do really matter in ultra-hazardous activities like nuclear program.

North Korea's nuclear program is known as having developed with sacrifice of North Korean population. However, we should not ignore the sacrifice of workers in North Korea's nuclear facilities. If six party talks resume, the human rights abuses in nuclear facilities must be negotiated as agenda.

I hope that you find this testimony to be useful to the discussions on North Korea's human rights abuses and crimes against humanity at this subcommittee. Thank you very much for your attention.

For complete written statement, please contact chshin@asaninst.org.