

Annex I

Selected Excerpts of NK Gulag 2011 Report - Research on Punishment of North Korean Defectors 2011

The report was based on interviews carried out by NK Gulag staff from January to May 2011. The report was based upon data derived from questionnaires and interviews in which 2012 North Korean defectors in South Korea and China participated. The full report can be obtained upon request to NK Gulag or North Korea Strategy Center.

[IN-01] Young-II Kim (alias)

(Born 1971/ Hoeryung City, North Hamgyong, Jeonggeori, No.12 Correctional Facility)

Q: So while you were eating you were arrested?

A: Yes, while we were eating at the restaurant. At first they said that they were from the youth coalition. We were sitting drinking when they came and asked, "Can we ask you something? They were dressed well so we asked, "Who?" And they said, "We came from the youth coalition". Since we were unemployed were probably looked suspicious, and the youth coalition usually cracks down on things like that. I'm not sure what you would call the youth coalition here."

Q: What do they enforce?

A: They arrest young people who are not working and sent them to labor facilities. In North Korea, they will make you work even without pay. From eight in the morning to six at night, you have to work even if you don't get paid because you have to participate in society. I asked them why they came for us when they had never even seen us before, and they answered that they just have a few things to ask so please follow them. So we followed them until we saw three guards and two cars waiting for us. They put us each into our own car and then I knew we were in trouble because the youth coalition was just a short walking distance away. We ended up going into the Onseong agency and there we were severely beat up. I was hit so much that my whole body was swollen like a pig.

Q: So you went to an interrogation facility?

A: Yes, for six months

Q: Can you tell us in detail what life was like in the prison?

A: You wake up at 5 a.m, and wash for 30 minutes. Washing is just one bath and everyone surrounds it to wash their face. The next thirty minutes they do roll call to make sure no one has escaped.

Q: What kind of food do you eat?

A: There are different levels of rice from one to seven. Level seven is for those who steal and fight or disobey within the prison, about half a paper cup. It's like "Eat this and work!" So we all eat till about 6.30 and then start to prepare for work. We put on our gloves that we have to make ourselves.

Q: Is it about self-sufficiency?

A: Yes, completely. Clothes, sewing, the men have to do it all for themselves. You can get what you want if you give away your food. It has to be about level three, which is about 1.5 to 2 paper cups full.

Q: I hear of many suicides, but are many deaths caused by torture at the agency?

A: Yes, there are incidents of being beaten to death. If anyone can't work because they are too tired and the team leader hits them in the wrong way they can die. If you die, they don't tell your family. They just say you died while working so don't ask. And then they burn all the dead bodies. There is an area where they burn about twenty people at a time... On average about one person will die every three days.

Q: Can you ever leave?

A: If you work well and give them bribes, and finish your sentence you can leave. That is the system that has been set up.

Q: You said someone died about every three days... how did they die?

A: They were beaten to death, starved to death, or died from weakness or from tuberculosis.

Q: What were the sanitary conditions like when you were in the prison camps?

A: They raise pigs there, and wow! The sanitary conditions of the North Korean prisons are a mess. There are dark blood stains on the walls. They cement the walls once and don't paint them. In the restrooms, the water is very cloudy. We had to wash our faces, our feet and our laundry all in the same water. It was unbearable.

[IN- 02] Jung Lan Kim

(Born in 1968/ North Hapkyung, Onseong-gun, National Security Agency/ Entered South Korea on July 6, 2008)

Q: What happened at Shin-eui Ju Authorities?

They took off all of our clothes. I was shocked. They shoved us into a jail and told us to turn around. The guards were men. They looked at us taking our clothes off through a hole in the door. We were standing naked in front of the guards. We tried to cover ourselves with blankets but they forced us not to. Then female guards came along and searched for money in our bodies. They told us to sit down and stand up repeatedly to see if money would come out of our wombs...

Another female guard came in. She was wearing rubber gloves and was holding an antiseptic solution. The guard started to open our wombs to look for money. We hid some money inside our anuses instead of our wombs. I had rolled the 2000 won into a finger-size and kept it in my anus.

Some dung came out with money. They did anything to search money inside our bodies. Whenever they found money, they beat people up so brutally...They just beat everyone up regardless of gender.

The interrogation was quite brutal. We were neither allowed to put our heads up nor to move our eyes around. They beat us up and down 50 times. (This torture is called pumping).

Posture correction process at Authorities in which we were fixed with our hand and legs tightly tied was so painful. We could not go to the toilets and we were constantly beaten up. We had to endure 'pumping' 800 times a day. Even men passed out...There was a father and son. The father died after three months, and the son died of tuberculosis after.

I was beaten unstoppably. They hit me on the face. They kicked my entire lower body with their shoes.

[IN- 03] Jihee Kim (alias)

(Born in 1991/ Hoeryung City, North Hamgyong, National Security Agency/ Entered Korea on March 20, 2009)

Q: Can you talk about your discomforts from being able unable to wash?

A: Sanitary conditions are horrible, because we cannot wash. My body was very dirty then because I did not wash. Adults were very uncomfortable because of their menstruation.

Q: How did they deal with their menstruation?

A: They would do it against a sock or something.

[IN-04] Kyung Sun Oh (Alias, female)

(Born in 1959, Entered South Korea on December 19th' 2009)(2008?)

Q: How did you defect from North Korea?

A: I tried to escape from North Korea three times between 1st of August 1998 and 27th of July 2005, and I finally managed to become admitted into South Korea on 19th December 2008... I managed to defect to China after my second attempt. While I was working, people wanted to sell me to a man. They beat me because I would not get married and all of my molars broke off. I pleaded so desperately to stop beating me but they would not listen at all. I knew that if I went back to North Korea with a lot of money, then I would not have to go to prison. One day, I was caught by Chinese police. I had to be dragged with my thumbs tied. Sometimes, during inspection, people's thumbs were shot off or they were relentlessly smashed on their heads with lumber. They even made us (women) to stand up and sit down naked, over a hundred times to

find out whether money was hidden in our wombs.

The last time I was repatriated in 2005, I was detained in a prison in Onseong for 7 months. Not only was I verbally abused, but also I was whipped after having been tempted by food. Warders attempted to take off my clothes and kicked my shins. I was not allowed to sleep at all because of interrogation...I was starved and tortured in so many different ways. For example, there was something called 'Needle torture' in which I sat surrounded by so many needles. If I had moved a bit, I would have been poked. Another way of torturing me was called 'water drop torture' in which water fell on my forehead drop by drop. It was so painful... I had to have 8 stitches on my head after it was broken, and two fingernails came off and they still haven't recovered fully.

Q: Were there other incidents you witnessed while you were in the prison?

A: There was a woman who had lived with a South Korean man in China and her 7-year-old son...The boy was beaten because he cried, and he was made to sleep on a cold floor in the middle of the corridor.

There was a couple who had lived in China. It was the 12th of April 2005. The woman passed her food on to her husband through a warder. It was because the day was his birthday... They took her outside and said, "you are not starved enough", and they beat her up so harshly. Her husband who realized that it was his wife being beaten up shouted, "That's my wife! Please punish me instead of her". The official chuckled and dragged him out and beat him to death in front of his wife. Having watched her husband get killed, she screamed crazily and went absolutely mad.

There was also a woman who was pregnant for 9 months. They took her somewhere and she bore her baby. They made her wrap the baby with a plastic bag. After two to three days, the baby started to make a noise like that of an animal, and eventually died. There were four other pregnant women, but all of them eventually died. It was because they did not receive good postnatal care and were malnourished.

Q: How are you now?

A: I am suffering from after-effects. I had to have 7kg of internal water taken out. I cannot urinate without medicine, so I must take it for the rest of my life.

[IN-05] Jae Hee Lee (Alias)

(Born in 1971, was in Hoeryung prison labor camp, entered South Korea on 23rd October, 2009)

Q: So, you were repatriated in 2003 for the first time. You then tried to escape but were forcibly repatriated for the second time. Was that in 2006?

A: Yes. I spend most of my time at a detention facility for about three months. People there beat me a lot. They made us stand facing the wall and beat us. They whipped me with their leather belts. It was so painful. Although I was beaten a lot in a Chinese prison, it was not as bad as a North Korean prison. The jail gate was so small. How can I describe this? I can't.

Q: So were you sent to a long-term prison labor camp in North Korea after that? What was your life like there?

A: My life? There were not many things to remember. There was something seriously wrong with my stomach even after I had undertaken some kind of treatment for it. North Korean corn soup contained unpeeled corn, mixed with sand. I could not eat anything for ten days.

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

A: I was told to pull something that had dung on it. I had no physical energy to pull it. So I was then made to do some physical exercise. I only went out to undergo labor three times a week because I was not helpful at all.

Q: So you were beaten harshly while in Jang-Chun prison in China and when being repatriated to North Korea. Were you tortured other than that?

A: Not really. But every prisoner was made to stand next to a wall. If someone starts to talk about his or her family, about 40 to 50 children in the jail start crying. They cry louder and louder. Then the police came along with a bat and began to beat us ruthlessly. I argued a lot, asking why I was inciting rebellion.

Q: So its most likely true that all female North Korean defectors will have their rights infringed when sent to a prison camp?;

A: Yes. Whether you are old or young does not matter, no one can have their rights protected. You must do what you are told to do.

Q: Have all women been sexually abused?

A: It is inevitable for pretty girls. All women must have been except the elderly and little children.

Q: How did others do at the labor facility?

A: A 23-year-old girl got summoned for sexual intercourse every night. [In a labor facility]

Q: Would family members be informed when someone died?

A: Most of the time, they will never find out.

Q: Tell me if there was an incident when you were treated like an animal in a very anti-humanitarian way.

A: I cannot put this into words. People here say small things are serious such as sexual abuse. But if you compare these things to what actually happens in North Korea such things would be nothing.

Q: How long were in the prison camp?

A: Just short of ten years. People say one year is enough.

Q: Do people get beaten regardless of their gender?

A: As for men, most of them get beaten to death or at least until they are half-dead.

Q: What was your life like in the long-term prison labor camp?

A: I was sent to a prison camp called Gum-Duck in 1999. It was too dry to grow plants. At Jun-Gu-ri labor camps, although plants grew well, the amount of labor we had to do was too much. The police officers always beat us up whenever they thought we were not working productively. After a year of over-demanding labor, I was chosen as the captain of a cell. I was also allowed to decide who was to be beaten or to be killed. There were initially 27 inmates at the prison labor camp, but its capacity increased and 40 people were put in the prison camp. Captains were indoctrinated to beat up those who did not work properly. But people were dying because of our physical abuse, and we were made to stop beating them. Captains would even be punished if they violated this rule. In 2002 and 2003, it was considered reasonable if one person died a month...

Q: What kind of labor did you have to do at the long-term prison camp?

A: I chopped trees and made fire from them for three years. I chopped oak trees of which the diameter of the upper end of the timber was 20 cm. I carried the chopped trees on a mountain which was 2000m high. I cut the trees into 2 or 3 meters long segments and put them on my back by slightly kicking the bottom ends of the trees.

[IN-07] Kyung Hoo Jang

(Born in 1982/ Social Security Department, Hoeryung City, North Hamgyong/ Entered South Korean on July 8, 2001)

Q: Where did they hit people?

A: If we don't listen to them, they hit our hands. Other than that, we have to copy and describe other people's criminal behavior as play. For instance, if there was a rapist, we copied and acted as a rapist.

Q: Was it supposed to be part of the punishment?

A: The cell chief lets us do such things as he gets bored of doing nothing. In winter we had nothing to do but sit on our knees from 5 am once we got up to 10-11 p.m till night.

The squad chief used to go to the women's cell or call women out to make fools of them doing weird things on them. Mostly the chiefs used to sleep in the girls' cell.

Q: So women have no rights?

A: Yes, they treat women badly at night.

Q: So what were the punishments like there?

A: I had 2-3 beating experiences for doing something wrong. It was a cold night, as I came back from working on the mountain around 2-3 am. My hands were freezing as I had not been given any

gloves, so I put my hands into my pockets. I was beaten because of that.

Q: Who hit people then?

A: The chiefs do, both squad and assistant chiefs. The guards just rest in the corner and give permission to hit the rest of us. According to North Korean law, you are not allowed to beat prisoners. Guards are cunning enough to give orders to the chiefs to beat others...The chiefs hit us with shovels.

Q: How did they hit?

A: For instance, I was sitting on my knees, with my hands on my knees. If I ever took my hands off my knees I would get beaten with a whip. It is much more painful than being beaten with a wooden club.

Q: Was there any other worse punishment than that?

A: Water pipe punishment and beatings. Water pipe punishment begins with 500 times of repetitions up and down. There are people in a line and they have to complete this 500 times. If anyone cannot carry on, everyone else gets punished. Also there is clockwise punishment. [Form a circle, and rotate]

[IN-08] Yeon Chung Cho (Alias)

(Born in 1982/ Hoeryung City, North Hamgyong, National Security Agency/ Entered South Korea in November, 2009)

Q: What kinds of torture were there?

A: They tortured me while sitting me down on a key-like chair. Two persons took turns beating me while I was stripped down to my underwear.

While sleeping we would be ordered to get into a push-up position, and if our knees or bellies touched the ground, they beat our backs with the rulers and kicked us. If you faint after being beaten too much, you are taken to the clinic to receive sedatives. We were beaten so much that our bodies were bruised all over.

Q: What's the daily routine at labor camp?

A: In a labor camp, we woke up around 7 in the morning and had time to wash up...There was labor such as carrying logs or building walls around an adulterer's house...We woke up early to go work and came back at night to eat dinner. The instructor had to cultivate the field for the meal. There were about 80 women and 15 men. Even children had to do all of this and receive beatings when they did wrong...They made us sleep early. We fought over the sleeping area. We couldn't even stretch our legs. We arranged our feet like the teeth of a saw. When you woke up in the morning, other people's feet were on your face and belly, it was too compact.

Q: Have you seen a public execution?

In October of 2008, they had one at Hoeryung gymnasium. It was in Sanup-dong. Back then, I was

hiding at my grandmother's place. My grandmother sold MSG at the market. She told me that there would be a public execution the next day. Four women in their thirties were going to be publicly executed. They were said to have hidden children and kimchi jars filled with candy and snacks, and were going to sell them off to China at night. Therefore, those four were shot to death. Another public execution was held at Hoeryung for eating a human being. A kid was eaten after being killed and bathed. A husband and his wife ate their neighbor's child.

[IN-09] Keom Sill Choi

(Born in 1971/ Pyung Nam II Labor Training Camp/Entered South Korea on May 7, 2005)

Q: Can you tell us what happened while you were being jailed?

A: My father-in-law had been a security man for the local authorities for 19 years. The last time I saw him he was carrying a public punishment for shooting two men. One of them was killed straight away, and the other was badly injured as far as I remember. After not having seen him for six months, I was told that he got killed by public punishment.

There was a pregnant woman and she had a miscarriage in the end. The baby was dumped into a toilet, wrapped in a plastic bag. She had only been pregnant for 8 months, but the other women in the cell forced her to give birth. The baby was suffocated inside the bag. They said they did it to her because the baby was Chinese.

I witnessed at least four people dying in the cell, Jung-ok, Kang Choobum, Soom-Keom and some youngsters. The prison guards never let us act individually. It wasn't like normal prisons within the camp. The treatment nearly led to our deaths. Our faces turned dark and we became extremely skinny, as we had no food. One girl died from malnutrition. An old lady passed away after a horrible bout of diarrhea. A week after her, another elderly woman passed away. She was almost 56 years old. One day, she suddenly became ill, but instead of treating the illness, she was kicked. She was kicked and beaten by the guards and to make matters worse, she was still sent out for labor. She died from dehydration.

[IN-10] Yoo Chung-Hwang (Alias)

(Born in 1963/ North Hamgyong, Hoeryung, National Security Agency/ Entered South Korea on March 20, 2010)

Q: Would you tell us how you ended up spending time in the camp, the process and life there?

A: At a labor camp, I denied everything, even the things I've done, and was beaten so much that I was about to faint. I spent 2 hours in Hoeryung labor camp... the beating I received on my head still hurt. I was beaten so much at that time.

I was tortured by getting my head banged on the steel door.

Q: During summer, can you take a shower if you want to?

A: No, you can't. There are 40 to 50 people in a small space to wash. There's only an hour to wash

up. Do you think everyone can do it? It's not possible. I don't have any memory of taking a bath there.